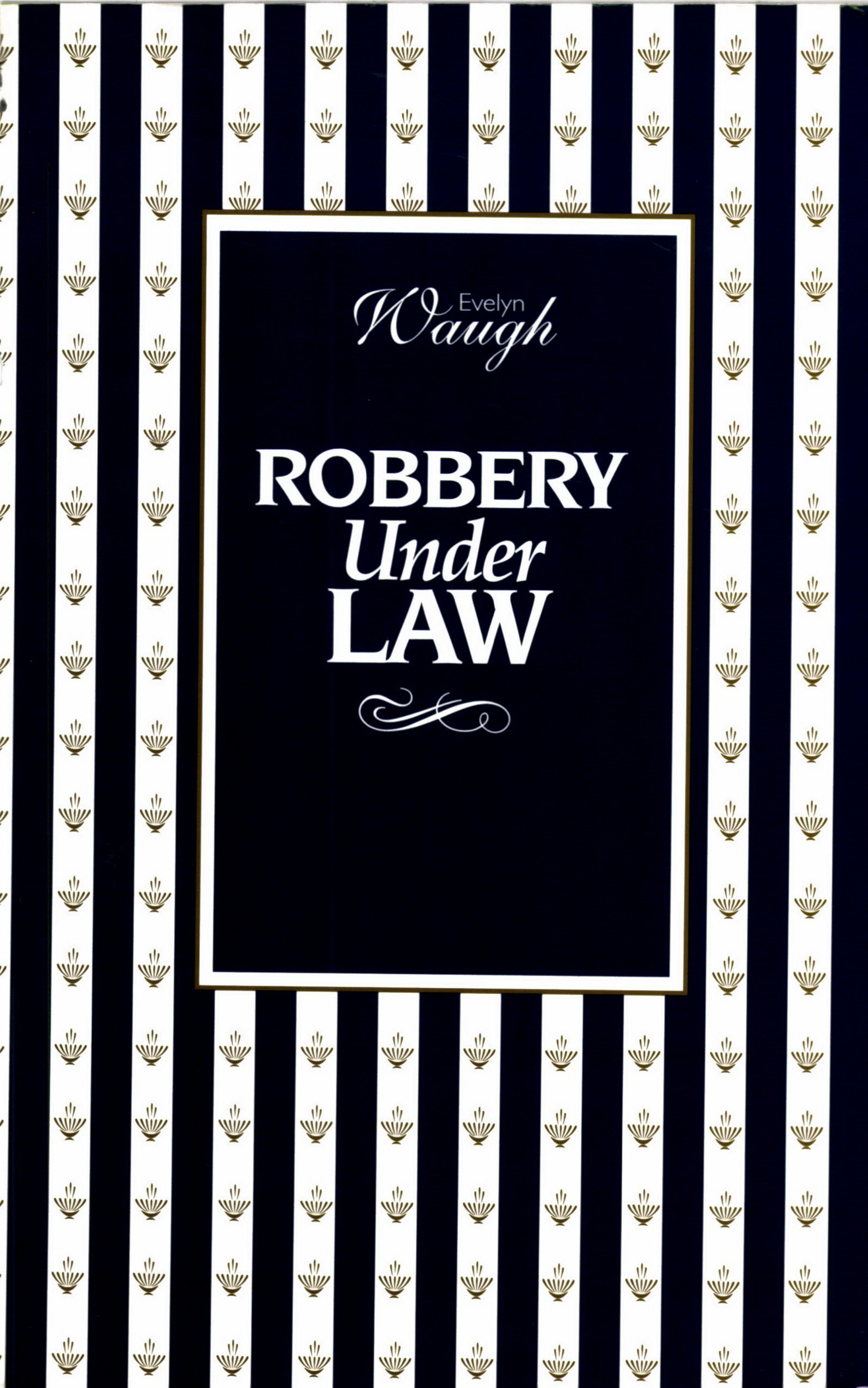

Evelyn
Waugh

ROBBERY
Under
LAW

ROBBERY UNDER LAW:
THE MEXICAN OBJECT-LESSON

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BY

EVELYN WAUGH

A COMMON READER EDITION
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FOREWORD

I AM indebted to many friends—old and new British, American and Mexican—for their abundant kindness to me in London, New York, Washington and Mexico. They provided me with a sequence of delightful introductions, entertained me in their homes, helped plan my journeys, talked to me very freely of their particular problems ; but this is an occasion, I believe, where gratitude is best expressed by silence. The appearance of their names here could only be an embarrassment to them. I formed my opinions in their company, but none of them will agree with all I have written, some of them with none of it. It would be idle to pretend that a visit to Mexico, at the present moment, can be wholly agreeable ; the pervading atmosphere ranges from vexation to despair, and only the most obtuse traveller could escape infection. That, in spite of the present gloomy spectacle and the still gloomier prospect of the future, there were more good hours than bad for me in Mexico, is entirely due to these friends. If they come to read this I should like them to know that I am sincerely grateful ; in particular to two, an Englishman and a Mexican, one of whom, harassed by personal worries, took all mine into his charge ; the other who was my constant companion in all my movements. I remember with delight the days at Orizaba and Cuernavaca, a bottle of magnificent claret in Mexico City, the trip down the railway, away from newspapers and wireless, during the European September crisis, the good company in the Ritz bar, the trust with which members of the Catholic laity accepted me. I am sorry that these happy episodes shall have so little reflection in the following pages, but, as my friends know better than I, there is at the moment no opportunity for solid happiness in Mexico.

E. W.

Stinchcombe, 1939.

ROBBERY UNDER LAW

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I

THIS is a political book; the sketch of a foreign country where I spent a day or so under two months; of a country which has already provoked a huge number of books, many of them by residents of life-long experience. I do not see how it is possible to escape the imputation of presumption. 'The fellow mugs up a few facts in the London Library, comes out here for a week or two with a bare smattering of the language, hangs about bothering us all with a lot of questions, and then proceeds to make money by telling us all our own business.'

It is a charge to which professional writers are commonly exposed and I know no answer except the truth: that this, in fact, is our professional habit. Superficial acquaintance is one of the materials of our trade. Other professions are equally culpable; the barrister spends an evening or two studying his brief, pleads in court as though he had never had any other interest in life than the welfare of the litigants, and, over his luncheon, forgets their names, their faces and everything about them. The medical specialist gives his diagnosis in an hour on a patient he has never seen in health and of whose life history he knows no more than a few routine questions will elicit. Compared with them a journalist is less presumptuous. His trade is to observe, record and interpret. He does not claim that in a month or two of sightseeing he has made himself an expert on local history and archæology ; still less that he has fitted himself for the post of benevolent dictator who can put right troubles which perplex the statesmen. His hope is to notice things which the better experienced accept as commonplace and to convey to a distant public some idea of the aspect and feel of a place which hitherto has been merely a geographical or political term, so that subsequent events reported thence in the newspapers—events which in the vagaries of contemporary history may quite suddenly have a rude impact on their own livelihood and lives—may have more interest and actuality. For this purpose even a few weeks may sometimes be too long. How many travel books open vividly and end in a mere catalogue of transport difficulties ! The truthful travel book rarely works to a climax ; the climax is sometimes the moment of disembarkation and everything beyond it an attempt to revive artificially, under the iron lung of rhythmic, day to day observations, the revelation of first acquaintance.

I went to Mexico in order to write a book about it ; in order to verify and reconsider impressions formed at a distance. To have travelled a lot, to have spent, as I had done, the first twelve years of adult life intermittently on the move, is to this extent a disadvantage that one's mind falls into the habit of recognizing similarities rather than differences. At the age of thirty-five one needs to go to the moon, or some such place, to recapture the excitement with which one first landed at Calais. For many people Mexico has, in the past, had this lunar character. Lunar it still remains, but in no poetic sense. It is waste land, part of a dead or, at any rate, a dying planet. Politics, everywhere destructive, have here dried up the place, frozen it, cracked it and powdered it to dust. Is civilization, like a leper, beginning to rot at its extremities? In the sixteenth century human life was disordered and talent stultified by the obsession of theology ; today we are plague-stricken by politics. It is a fact ; distressing for us, dull for our descendents, but inescapable. This is a political book ; its aim, roughly, is to examine a single problem ; why it was that last summer a small and almost friendless republic jubilantly recalled its Minister from London, and, more important, why people in England thought about this event as they did ; why, for instance, patriotic feeling burst into indignation whenever a freight ship—British only in name, trading in defiance of official advice—was sunk in Spanish waters, and remained indifferent when a rich and essential British industry was openly stolen in time of peace. If one could understand that problem one would come very near to understanding all the problems that vex us today, for it has at its origin the universal, deliberately fostered anarchy of public relations and private opinions that is rapidly making the world uninhabitable.

The succeeding pages are notes on anarchy.

2

Travellers from New York to Mexico have a choice of route ; they may take either the weekly steamship for Vera Cruz or the faster, more costly, daily train. The inexperienced and economical, of whom I was one, prefer the former ; inexperienced, for I was thinking of trains in un-American terms. New York was in the depth of a heat-wave ; one stepped right down into it, as into a bath, from the gangway of the liner. Those who have been in New York at such a time—if such a time has ever occurred before, which the daily papers and one's own sense of probability made one doubt—will understand what it means ; to those who have not, words are useless. It is enough to say that it seemed inconceivable that anyone could hesitate between a week at sea, with fresh breezes and shady decks, and four days cramped in a sleeper, rattling into the tropics through the burning plains of Texas and St. Luis Potosi. Now I know better. There are a number of objections which the jealous European may make to American trains—as that they are slow, that one is knocked off one's feet whenever they stop and start, that one has no assurance of fermented liquor with one's food—but, when all is said, it remains true that they are the most comfortable means of getting across country yet devised by man. I did not know that at the time ; nor did I know what to expect on board the steamship.

Half the polite letters of the world take the form of contrasting expectation with realization. I had formed an image of what the *S.S. Siboney* would be like. I saw her—Heaven knows why, except that the fare was cheap—as a cargo vessel carrying a few heterogeneous passengers in rough and homely comfort ; a ship something like the coasters of the Gulf of Corinth, full of traders and prospectors and nondescript adventurers whose table talk would supplement my meagre and purely academic acquaintance with the country to which we were travelling. But the *Siboney* is purely and simply a tourist service, gallantly attempting to reproduce a luxury cruise at cut-price rates ; admirable for its purpose, but no manner of use to a writer in search of local colour. The ship was fairly full, of women, mostly, who were on their way to Mexico to have a good time.

Mexico is a long way from England, and you do not meet a great many Englishmen who have been there ; it is next door to the U.S.A. and holiday-makers swarm across the border like ants. Tourist traffic was down last year, like every Mexican business, but it is still large and the depreciation of the peso has done a good deal to counteract the—at the moment quite groundless—apprehensions about personal safety. It is doubly important, in Mexico because anything that brings foreign currency into the republic is desperately needed ; in U.S.A. because anything which helps to form American public opinion about its dangerous little neighbour, is, at the moment, of disproportionate interest.

As far as Mexico is concerned the tourists are not popular ; I doubt whether they are anywhere in the world except at sea-side resorts and in Norway. It is a long abandoned belief that tourism, like competitive athletics, makes for international friendship. The three most hated peoples in the world—Germans, Americans and British—are the keenest sight-seers. There are very few English villagers who have seen an Egyptian ; very few Egyptian villagers who have not seen an Englishman ; the result is that the English generally are well disposed towards Egypt, while the Egyptians detest us. Sympathy for foreigners varies directly with their remoteness. We were prepared to love the Abyssinians ; Italians, for most of us, meant a customs official we had fallen out with, or an avaricious cab-driver. Moreover a race who stay at home and are visited extensively from abroad fall into the error of supposing all foreigners to be very rich and very frivolous. Few Mexicans ever saw a poor Englishman or American ; it is not unnatural that they get an impression that they are having the worst of the international deal and are being mulcted. (Twenty years ago, of course, the Monagasques had never seen a poor Mexican, but that is distant history.) Not that the American tourists are big spenders. Mexico is for those who cannot afford the Grand Tour to Europe. They buy round tickets and except for getting a few execrable objects as presents for those at home, they do not want to spend any more ; tips and guides are included in their fare. They have a national abhorrence of beggars. The profits are carefully calculated and not much slips into general circulation. It can well be argued, in general terms, that a country is happier without tourists, but Mexico is in no position to be fastidious about its sources of revenue. It values the tourist trade and would feel the loss if the frontier were closed. It has laid out a lot of money in roads and hotels and has even, in late years, modified some of its more conspicuous abuses in deference to tourists' protests ; in particular the loot and destruction of Spanish-Colonial art treasures and the persecution of the clergy. Some of the Mexicans in the government party have realized that the tourists do not come simply to exercise their motor cars or, now that Prohibition is more or less over, to drink imported whiskey ; that seventeenth century silver-ware is more valuable in its existing shape than melted into a lump ; that if you want some proofed canvas to patch a roof it is cheaper in the long run to buy a piece, than to clamber onto the altar of the village church and cut a Cabrera out of the reredos ; the enlightenment comes late but it is something gained, and something for which, indirectly, we may thank the jolly young women of the *S.S. Siboney.*

Americans undoubtedly feel a sense of responsibility towards Mexico. Later, on my homeward journey, I fell into conversation with an insurance agent returning across the border from a ' convention ' of fellow insurance men who were having a corporate jaunt together twenty strong. He told me in full detail about the prosperity of his business and the terms of affectionate subservience on which he lived with his wife. I asked him after a time if he knew England. No, he said, he had never been abroad.

After two months in Mexico that came as a surprise, for I could conceive of no two countries more foreign to one another than his and the one he had just been visiting. It is true, of course, that he had travelled in an American built, air-conditioned coach, that he had found ice-water and American cereals on the breakfast table at his hotel, hall porters and barmen who understood his English, and what was in intention and origin, if not in effect, American plumbing, but he could not long have been taken in by these things. It was not so much kinship as proprietorship that he felt. His was the attitude of the nineteenth century Englishman towards Ireland. He saw Mexico as backward and deficient in many of the advantages of the northern system. In particular he was impressed by the physical dirt ; food being exposed for sale without its decent wrapping of cellophane shocked his sense of propriety ; the place needed taking in hand ; the people should be taught industrious and hygienic habits. Labour had got a bit out of hand lately ; well, they had had a raw deal before, now they were getting a bit of their own back ; it would all even up soon and better relations be established. The Church had had too much money and they spent it all on extravagant building instead of teaching the people ; most of those big buildings *were* schools ? He hadn't understood that from the guide—but, anyhow, what did they teach ? Only a lot of Latin and stuff. The landowners ill-treated the peasants and lived in Biarritz ; pity the peasants were worse off now than they were before, but that would come right when they'd been taught modern methods ; pity the Government took away Americans' estates, too, but they had said they would pay for them one day. He knew that historically and economically the Government was dependent on his ; he thought it a pity that the frontier should have been drawn where it had been ; Mexico was a projection of California and Texas ; it needed no violent imperialism ; clean it up a bit and it would come into the Federation on its own account. Like the nineteenth century Englishman in Ireland, he overlooked the one vital difference—that Mexico was a foreign country. His attitude, I think, is still in the main that of the State Department at Washington.

In contrast to this type of transitory visitor there are a large number of Americans who find, or profess to find in Mexico a spiritual home. These are the painters and writers who make such a large and charming section of the English speaking colony. Here in the hills they find an antidote for all the ills of their native civilization. Although, almost all of them, dependent on invested capital for their livelihood, they express generous sympathy with General Cardenas's socialist régime. They see Mexico as they were first taught to see it by the travel-agencies' folders, as a country of sunny, indolent peasantry, ancient domes and patios, local feasts that are spontaneous and traditional—a happy change from the more organized junketings of Elks and Shriners in their own home towns ; they see a land where ambition, and particularly financial ambition, is not the dominant passion. Though they would vehemently disclaim it, the truth is that they are in love with Europe ; they are nostalgic for the Classical-Christian culture from which they remotely spring, which they can find transplanted, transformed in part, but still recognizable in Mexico. They see it, as Dr. Munthe saw San Michele, and it is largely due to their sentimental vision, that the legend has spread and earned credence, of the parasitic white tyrant and the patient savage. The new mood in the Mexican governing clique is destructive of all they value but few of them seem to recognise this ; quite soon they may have a rude shock but at the moment they are happy with their tropical plants, collections of bric-a-brac, and albums of Diego Rivera. Their books are published in large quantities in the United States ; in England seekers of the picturesque have a wider scope and the writer who has given most people their ideas about Mexico is D. H. Lawrence ; and he hated it. He was taken in by a great many things, but never by the *San Michele* view of Mexico. He came there hoping for an antidote to the poison of industrialism and he left in disgust ; he never forgot it. Every traveller to Mexico must read the *Plumed Serpent ;* at any rate the opening chapters. The early, satirical passages about Mexico City—the bull fight, the tea party . . . ' all jade is bright green ' . . .—are superb. Then his loneliness and lack of humour and his restless, neurotic imagination combine to make one of the silliest stories in recent literature. I defy anyone who has not been hypnotised by Lawrence's reputation to read the account of Kate's marriage—the corpulent, middle-aged Irish woman waddling out into the rain in her homespun shift ; the swarthy little bridegroom trotting beside her in his bedraggled white pants ; the words of the ceremony, ' This man is my rain from heaven ', the rubbing of the roots of her hair and the soles of her feet with salad oil—without being inevitably reminded of ' Beachcomber's ' column in the *Daily Express ;* and the account of the bogus paganism is sillier, if less funny ; when Lawrence describes the secession to it of many of the local clergy—who have been unjustly accused of many defects but never of lack of tenacity in their faith—he passes beyond Mexico into a world of stark nonsense.

Nevertheless, for all its folly, the *Plumed Serpent* is a better guide to Mexico than Mr. Philip Terry. His is the standard work ; it was on sale on board the *Siboney* and in every bookshop in Mexico City. In appearance it has some superficial likenesses to the works of Baedeker . . . I could write at length on my horror of Terry's Guide ; enough to say that it says nothing that could offend any local sentiment, nor could interest any serious traveller, but is well suited to the requirements of most of the *S.S. Siboney* round-tour passengers, who like their accommodation the better for seeing it extravagantly praised in print and have too much on their hands, anyway, to mind missing the more unobtrusive sights which it is the primary duty of a guide book to mention.

Besides the holidaymakers and the sentimentalists there is a third rapidly increasing group of foreign visitors to Mexico. These are the ideologues ; first in Moscow, then in Barcelona, now in Mexico these credulous pilgrims pursue their quest for the promised land ; constantly disappointed, never disillusioned, ever thirsty for the phrases in which they find refreshment. They have flocked to Mexico in the last few months for the present rulers have picked up a Marxist vocabulary so that, from being proverbial for misgovernment, the republic, now at its nadir of internal happiness and external importance, greatly to the surprise of its citizens, has achieved the oddest of reputations—that of ' contemporary significance '. But there were no recognizable ideologues on board the *Siboney*—and they are usually recognizable.

3

On the eve of our arrival in Mexican waters we were summoned to the lounge to hear an address from the purser on our behaviour in a foreign country. Curiosity and the lack of alternative occupation provided a large attendance. Just outside the door was a tank of iced drinking-water and a column of cardboard cups. As the passengers assembled they paused at this national monument and drank ; it was like a congregation coming into church passing the stoop of holy water. When they were all refreshed and settled the purser entered. He was a personable, rather grim fellow in whom the distaste for passengers, endemic in all good seamen, seemed tempered by compassion. His speech, presumably, was the same every sailing ; I wish I had been able to record it verbatim for it was a model of what such speeches should be.

First he explained the arrangements for disembarkation and the requirements of customs and immigration officials ; he told them to us succinctly, in detail, more than once, with a tolerant acceptance of our intellectual limitations, like a very patient and experienced schoolmaster. One would have thought he had made himself plain ; one would have been wrong as was evident, at the end, when he invited questions . . . " We have to take charge of our own tourist cards ? " ; " Yes " ; " You mean when we go ashore we carry them with us ? " ; " Yes " ; " Is this what you call a tourist card ? " ; " Yes " ; " We can't leave them on the ship ? " ; " No " ; " Which of these is my tourist card ? " ; " Is *this* my tourist card ? " ; " Is this *my* tourist card ? " ; " Is this my *tourist card ?* " . . . When that was over he admonished us about our behaviour . . . " Most of you have never been out of your own country before," he said. "Well, you mustn't expect to find things exactly the same as they are back home." The Mexican, he said, was a charming fellow if you treated him right. He was out to give us a good time ; we must do our share too. We wanted a good time ; the company wanted us to have a good time ; he spoke for the officers, the crew and the staff when he said we ought to have a good time. Well the secret of that was to make up our minds to have a good time. If we didn't complain of the Mexican, he wouldn't get sore with us and then we should not have so much to complain of. The Mexican was very proud. We must remember it was *his* country. If we had any criticisms we had better wait till we were back home and make them there. We might see a lot of things in Mexico that seemed strange to us. We mustn't expect things to be the same as they were back home. " Don't go taking pictures of the poor." There were plenty of things to take pictures of if we wanted to take pictures ; but not the poor. " We've got our breadlines back home. We shouldn't like it if anyone took pictures of them . . . Don't start any arguments about religion or politics. The Mexicans are doing their best and they like to think they are being appreciated, same as we do . . ."

It was very sound advice, and it provoked reflection. What exactly is the proper mood in which to approach a foreign country in these days? It is an important point, particularly to Americans and English for we are the great travelling race in whose interest all the tourist bureaux of the world are organized.

It is interesting to read the travel books of fifty years ago and notice their air of tolerant or intolerant superiority. Perhaps at the time there was some justification for it ; now there is very little. The words progressive and backward have become confused in their meanings. The old idea was of universal, inevitable progress ; the nations were like horses at ' Minaroo ', moving at varying speeds towards the same object ; sometimes one nation would have a run of luck, sometimes another. Britain at the moment was leading ; other races, like us in ambition, but lacking our courage, integrity and good sense, were just behind ; others, such as the hottentots, had barely started ; others, such as the Spanish and Chinese, had made fly-away starts but failed to hold the pace. Certain defects, in particular, held people back from success —aristocratic or autocratic forms of government, the Church of Rome, etc. All that they needed was revolution, capitalization and education. It was the duty of the more prosperous nations to lead and to lend . . . Alas, recent history has made it impossible for a thoughtful European to view the world with the same easy assurance. We have seen devils driven out and replaced by worse. Free Trade and the system of mobile financial credits scarcely exist ; representative institutions survive precariously only in the countries of their origin. And as for moral superiority . . . how about ourselves? What were the grounds on which we were used to censure the backward Latin-American republics? They neglected to pay their public debts; what European country can afford to be censorious about that today? A political career, in those dissolute communities, more often ended in murder than in a peerage and a pension; Dollfuss? Sotelo? Matteotti? the Romanoffs? Schleicher? the early Bolshevists and the early Nazis? Did a British Prime-Minister not win an election with the promise to hang the Kaiser? They neglected their legacy of art and architecture; how about England? Which is worse, the destruction that comes of poverty, or of riches? Bandits were still at large; St. Valentine's day in Chicago? The people were credulous and superstitious; what popular English paper can dispense with its astrological column? Education was a monopoly of the Church; which is the sounder, the catechism, or the race-mythology taught in half the schools of Europe today?

No, we must leave our superiority in bond when we cross the frontier; it is no longer for importation to foreign countries.

And there is another form of priggishness, too, with which we can dispense—the humbug of being unbiased. No one can grow to adult age without forming a set of opinions; heredity, environment, education and experience all condition us; the happiest are those who have allowed their opinions and beliefs to grow naturally; the unhappy are those who accept intellectually a system with which they are out of sympathy. When we go abroad we take our opinions with us; it is useless to pretend, as many writers do, that they arrive with minds wholly innocent of other experience ; are born anew into each new world. Nor do our readers desire it. There is nothing more repugnant to the English reader than to be obliged to form his own judgment afresh with each book he takes up. Indeed readers, bored with the privilege of a free press, have lately imposed on themselves a voluntary censorship ; they have banded themselves into Book Clubs so that they may be perfectly confident that whatever they read will be written with the intention of confirming their existing opinions.

Let me, then, warn the reader that I was a Conservative when I went to Mexico and that everything I saw there strengthened my opinions. I believe that man is, by nature, an exile and will never be self-sufficient or complete on this earth ; that his chances of happiness and virtue, here, remain more or less constant through the centuries and, generally speaking, are not much affected by the political and economic conditions in which he lives ; that the balance of good and ill tends to revert to a norm ; that sudden changes of physical condition are usually ill, and are advocated by the wrong people for the wrong reasons ; that the intellectual communists of today have personal, irrelevant grounds for their antagonism to society, which they are trying to exploit. I believe in government ; that men cannot live together without rules but that these should be kept at the bare minimum of safety ; that there is no form of government ordained from God as being better than any other ; that the anarchic elements in society are so strong that it is a whole-time task to keep the peace. I believe that inequalities of wealth and position are inevitable and that it is therefore meaningless to discuss the advantages of their elimination ; that men naturally arrange themselves in a system of classes ; that such a system is necessary for any form of co-operative work, more particularly the work of keeping a nation together. I believe in nationality ; not in terms of race or of divine commissions for world conquest, but simply this : mankind inevitably organises itself into communities according to its geographical distribution ; these communities by sharing a common history develop common characteristics and inspire a local loyalty ; the individual family develops most happily and fully when it accepts these natural limits. I do not think that British prosperity must necessarily be inimical to anyone else, but if, on occasions, it is, I want Britain to prosper and not her rivals. I believe that war and conquest are inevitable ; that is how history has been made and that is how it will develop. I believe that Art is a natural function of man ; it so happens that most of the greatest art has appeared under systems of political tyranny, but I do not think it has a connection with any particular system, least of all with representative government, as nowadays in England, America and France it seems popular to believe ; artists have always spent some of their spare time in flattering the governments under whom they live, so it is natural that, at the moment, English, American and French artists should be volubly democratic.

Having read this brief summary of the political opinions I took with me to Mexico, the reader who finds it unsympathetic may send the book back to her library and apply for something more soothing. Heaven knows, she will find plenty there.

CHAPTER TWO

TOURIST MEXICO

I

THE colonial flavour that still lingers everywhere in Mexico for those who care to find it, is nowhere more marked than in the abrupt division between rural and urban life. One is reminded of Africa, where village life, unaltered in centuries, exists within a mile of the new European cities. Mexican culture is not homogeneous ; it exists, as it did in the fifteenth century, in a system of towns, which lie scattered like a constellation over the great plateau and beyond it, varying in splendour and importance with their distance from the capital. For the plateau is still the centre of what survives of Mexican culture. Nearly half the whole area of the Republic, it is true, lies North of the most southern point of the United States ; South of the plateau are great tracts of tropical forest, and to the East the remote, ill-reputed peninsula of Yucatan, but in common speech and in historical fact, Mexico *is* the tableland—the Mesa Central de Anahuac, a vast, rocky, temperate area tilted towards the Pacific, 1,500 miles long by 500 or 600 miles in width. It is superb country, mountainous, volcanic, cracked and pitted with green cultivable valleys and wooded slopes rising above the snow line, into angular shining peaks ; graced, every few miles, by the domes and façades of the conquerors' churches ; when the clouds lift, everything is a shade sharper and brighter in the thin, dry air of the highlands than seems natural to Northern eyes. Certainly it is now a spectacle of decay ; the little valleys are often rank and deserted, where the peasants have edged in towards the larger centres of population, or have been transported hundreds of miles away to other states to be settled on the unfamiliar, stolen lands of the great proprietors ; the wooded slopes have been prodigally stripped for charcoal ; the churches and monasteries have been sacked in turn by rebels and government and left to fall in ruin, for the governing Mexicans are ashamed of their Spanish past and, except in the main tourist centres (and pretty shoddily there) do nothing for its preservation, squandering instead the small sums available for the Department of Arts on reconstructing the infinitely tedious pyramids and terraces of their Aztec and Mayan conquerors. But even in its decay the plateau is a spectacle of intoxicating beauty ; this is the Mexico of history ; of Montezuma, Cortes, Iturbide and Maximilian.

Roughly at the centre of the plateau, lies the capital. Just as the towns have unusual importance in the country, so Mexico City has a unique position among the towns. It shelters nearly a tenth of the whole population of the Republic. It is the centre of government. Mexico, in this respect, is the exact opposite of France, whose government comes from the provinces and revolution from the capital. In Mexico the vice-regal tradition persists ; the Federal Constitution has never had very much significance ; it was a half-sincere compliment to the powerful neighbour in the North ; the political habits of the Republic remain consistently autocratic and centralized. From time to time savages come from the North and South, either in armies or single adventurers to capture the seat of power ; from time to time the local governors achieve a temporary independence, but in successive revolutions the people of Mexico City have usually declared for the existing regime, and it is from the city that such order as exists, emanates. It is to Mexico City that the tourist naturally goes, and from there that he plans his journeys.

It is a huge, crowded, cosmopolitan, infernally noisy place where everything contrives to puzzle and stun the stranger, so that in the first days of his visit he lives in a kind of breathless trance—actually breathless, for the altitude plays tricks with even the most robust constitution, so that the even-tempered find themselves liable to sudden, unreasonable explosions of rage, the heartiest eaters lose their appetite, and the most energetic are overcome by lassitude. It is doubtful how much humankind can become properly at ease in this climate ; perhaps one may attribute to it a great part of the otherwise unaccountable alternations of listlessness and violence that have made Mexican history.

2

It depends on the circumstances of his arrival whether listlessness or violence is dominant in the stranger's mind during his first hours in the country. If he comes, as most seem to do, in the charge of a tourist agency, or if, as was my own fortunate experience, a friend has heroically risen at dawn to meet him, he passes through the station in an agreeable daze, shielded from too early contact with the inhabitants ; if, however, he is travelling on his own, he receives his first rude acquaintance with local conditions from the railway porters.

I remember reading in the *New Statesman* one of those warm-hearted little articles which used to appear in the early days of the Spanish civil war ; the author—Mr. Cyril Connolly, I think—was describing his emotions when he crossed from capitalist France into the free, proletarian air of Catalonia ; the particular mark, he said, of the Workers' State, was the elimination of the outstretched palm. If this is so, the Mexicans, in this matter as in much else, have got their Marxism a little mixed, for the exactions to which the traveller is liable have no parallel elsewhere in the world. Mexico is the only country I know of where one is invited to pay for carrying one's own hand luggage.

But, as I have said, on this first grey and chilly morning, I was relieved from all annoyance and hospitably conducted to my quarters.

The principal hotel stands in the old Spanish town, in the street now named Avenida Madero. There are others larger, more expensive, and more recently built, offering an equal profusion of hot, cold and iced water, but it is to the Ritz that people naturally gravitate who are spending any length of time in the city. It is the only hotel frequented by the Mexicans themselves and it has the somewhat equivocal advantage of standing in the heart of the busiest street.

Busiest street ! . . . Mexico is the most shrill and thunderous city in the world. Noise is the first, shattering greeting to the stranger, it is the constant companion of all his days, the abiding memory which he takes home with him to the nordic stillness of London or New York. Noise of every conceivable kind competing for predominance. Noise of traffic ; the old-fashioned courtesy for which many Mexicans are justly famous seems to forsake them when they get behind the wheel of a motor car. They move, as all urban drivers must, in a series of rushes, like infantry advancing through machine-gun fire ; when they are halted they hoot continuously to be released ; when they go, they still hoot to scare off the streets any aged and infirm persons who have got caught, half way across, by the change of lights ; embedded here and there in the turmoil, raised sometimes on little platforms covered in advertisements, stand policemen, whistling.

The sidewalks—they cannot be called pavements, for the greater part of them are not paved but coated with undulating asphalt—are very narrow and full of foot passengers, but, oddly enough, they are the main centre of social life and the noise of human voices is louder, even, than the claxons ; there are few cafés and little café life in Mexico ; what there is occurs at night ; during the day, at the crowded hours, if a Mexican wants to talk with his friends, he stands in the middle of the sidewalk and yells—politics, politenesses, business negotiations, anything that requires full verbal expression. And above them again—for as the conversationalists seek to outtalk the traffic, so they must interrupt the conversationalists—rise the voices of the street sellers, calling the numbers of lottery tickets and the headlines of the newspapers. In justice to the beggars who throng the side streets, it should be said that they are, when sober, a quiet lot ; they rely for their appeal on proximity, pushing their faces very close and muttering confidentially or, in the case of the children, merely swinging on one's coat-tails and reciting the rosary. There are, however, street singers with curiously penetrating tones and I met one old Indian who was well ahead of the traffic, playing an instrument entirely new to me—the nose-organ.

Besides these purely communicative and representational sounds, there is the abstract noise for noise's sake—the bashing together of pieces of wood or iron, preferably in the echoing light-wells of the larger buildings, for no other purpose than the general good ; for Mexicans feast on sound, as the more ascetic nordics fast on stillness, and count no man happy until his ear drums are ringing. Thus if one arrives early at the leading restaurant of the place, the head-waiter hospitably puts himself out to set you at ease and relieve the unhomely silence, by grinding the legs of the furniture on the tiled floor till the tables round you fill up and all is Babel again.

At night, in the shabbier parts of the city, and in all quarters of the provincial towns, the stranger is liable to be alarmed by what sounds like rifle fire. Occasionally, no doubt, it is so. In the brave days of Carranza and Calles people were fairly free with firearms ; they used to shoot the street lamps after a party and not infrequently their fellow guests. But most of these explosions come from fireworks and from bits of dynamite stolen from the mines. Europeans like fireworks for their visual effect and regard the noise as an inevitable concomitant. The Mexicans like the noise alone and most of their fireworks provide plain, large bangs.

But of all the noises of Mexico City the loudest and most individual was made by the mechanical pile-driver opposite the Opera House. Thud-shriek, thud-shriek ; it worked day and night ; the hammer fell, the compressed air escaped and the great tree trunks sank foot by foot into the soft sub-soil. While, in the general slump, other major works were at a standstill, this infernal machine pounded on incessantly, dominating a whole quarter of the city. By a peculiar irony it was constructing new vaults for the metallic reserves of the National Bank. The national finances that summer were a joke which was offensive to nobody. Revenue was down, production was down, credit was down, trade was down ; the pile-driver seemed to thump home monotonously the simple facts of national bankruptcy. No figures had been published for some time but everyone, whatever his politics, believed that the President was keeping up the peso by buying American dollars at a rate which would completely empty the treasury in a few months ; after that lay a prospect of inflation, repudiation, confiscation. Everyone, for various reasons, wanted a crisis (with the possible exception of the American ambassador and it did not occur to him that a crisis was imminent) for when the last of the metal reserves had left the country, the Mexican government would have to readjust itself, one way or another. And everyone had different ideas of the readjustment that was required. Meanwhile the pile-driver prepared the new vaults.

No description of Mexico City should be complete without some mention of Popocatapetl. The city lies in its shadow and other travellers have felt, or professed to feel, the life of the place dominated by its vast and splendid bulk. Honesty obliges me to confess that I never saw it, as it should be seen, rising above the domes of the city. I saw it only once, late in the evening, returning from the country, before the buildings came into sight. For the remainder of my visit it remained hidden in cloud. Perhaps it is needed to complete the composition; every great city needs some physical features, sea or river or palm belt among surrounding wastes, to give it a shape and purpose; the flatness of Mexico City with its curtain of low cloud gives it, in the rainy season, a ramshackle appearance which is not in its nature, as though for all its solidity and evident age it were a great camping ground. But it is full of splendid sights.

The area—particularly when you look down on it from the surrounding hills—seems enormous. There is the old colonial town, very large indeed for the age and circumstances in which it was built, beyond which on three sides stretch large, drab, proletarian quarters; on the other side is the new, residential city which grew up in the Diaz-Limantour era of prosperity; broad streets named after the cities of Europe (' Liverpool ' is one of the best addresses) flanked by villas in Fitzjohn's Avenue style. Most of them have gardens of a sort—everything grows big and flabby in

Mexico—and many English ladies wage a gallant defensive action over patches of grass. These houses no longer suggest opulence, but there is still a certain smugness about them ; few are, as yet, actually in decay, though they keep their gates inhospitably padlocked. Beyond, round the palace of Chapultepec a new suburb has grown up ; the ring of villas is spreading everywhere on the surrounding plain, for urban house property is one of the few investments that have not yet been attacked by the government. Railway and utility stock and government bonds are more or less worthless. The nearest thing to a gilt-edged security is suburban rents and it is in these that the bull-fighters and politicians invest their savings. As a result most people in Mexico City with any money to spare, seem to spend most of it, and of their time, in litigation with tenants, sub-tenants and building contractors.

In style these new houses vary from Hollywood Spanish (wrought iron, tiles, spindly little colonnades, etc.) which—heaven knows why—is thought to be the more aristocratic, to the Nazi-factory manner (concrete and steel) which—heaven knows why—is thought to be the more Marxist. The most painful effort of this latter kind was designed by the painter Diego Rivera and placed, in poignant contrast, next door to the San Angel Convent (now a road-house). As modern suburbs go, they are inoffensive and compare quite favourably with anything in France or England.

The old town is full of entrancing buildings, civil and ecclesiastical. They stand everywhere in silent reproach of the surrounding chaos, and if contemporary habits of life look shoddier and sillier for their presence, they offer continual compensation and encouragement to the distressed stranger.

The city has the advantage of a good, whitish grey building stone and of a material unique to the place—a deep red volcanic clay which rapidly hardens after cutting, somewhat in the manner of West of England cobb. These two are sometimes combined with Puebla tile and majolica work; the sculpture which is used abundantly, and, in the best examples, with contrasting alternations of absolutely plain masonry, is the work of Indians copying motifs from imported engravings and pieces of furniture, and adding to them a great deal of their own very peculiar, far from prosaic mentality. For the stone deaf, or for those whose æsthetic enthusiasm is powerful enough to exclude interruption, Mexico City is a delight, for it is not so surveyed and catalogued that one cannot make discoveries for oneself, nor so modernized that there are no discoveries to make.

The Juarez reforms destroyed some fine churches, and spoilt others by driving streets through the monastic gardens and crowding with commercial erections façades which were designed to be seen from a distance, but enough remains to give a very fair idea of the splendour of a century ago. Cultured Mexicans complain a great deal, but they have suffered less than we have. Their countrymen on the whole, have been rather frivolous in their vandalism; they have stolen and neglected and put things to unsuitable uses, but there has been none of the systematic extermination of good architecture the Londoners have enjoyed. When, for instance, the Government took over the charitable foundation of the Vizcainas, they merely bricked up the doors of the famous, rococo chapel ; it is still there in the dark ; one day someone will find it again with rejoicing. The iconoclasm too is tolerably impartial ; the art of the liberators suffers equally with the relics of the oppressors. At the Ministry of Education—the lodging it so happens of the Department of Arts—an acre or so of Diego Rivera fresco is rapidly being reduced to bare plaster by civil servants who beguile their luncheon hour scratching off the paint, and the fine crazy pictures of Orosco at the Preparatory School have already been obliterated as high as a man's hand can reach.

One is reminded again of the Irish who look on the English as the Mexicans do on the Spanish, dislike their art as evidence of their occupation, but let it decay in its own time. " Thou shalt not kill, yet needs not strive officiously to keep alive " seems to be the principle of both local governments, and we, in England, have no cause to be censorious. I suppose Venice in the last days of the Austrian occupation, when the palaces were turning into tenements and warehouses, must have looked rather like Mexico City. English and American romantics did a great deal for the preservation of Venice. It is not too late to save Mexico. Perhaps one day we shall see it happen. Wealthy Americans may restore and refurnish the old houses. There may be a Mexican season. American heiresses may start marrying Mexicans ; a College of Arms may be set up to polish the pedigrees and titles of the colonial families and a new society arise of elegant international Marquesas.

Meanwhile the palaces and all the buildings of the city suffer, however, from one danger that never much troubled Venice ; as though in shame of their posterity they are literally sinking into the ground. For Mexico is built on soft mud. Even the new Opera House has gone down a yard or two. This process plays odd tricks in proportion ; doors that were designed to rise on steps now stand below street level ; plinths have disappeared totally ; columns now rise, baseless as Bayswater Doric ; windows are at knee height. In the case of the earliest buildings the loss is least felt ; it contributes to the general picturesque ; but at the end of the eighteenth century a first class classical architect named Tolsa devised what should have been the finest buildings in the New World. It is impossible now to see anything as he drew it. His School of Mines [1] has not only sunk, but sunk irregularly so that the cornice curves like the lines of a ship, and his severely symmetrical Church of Our Lady of Loreto is full of all the dizzy optical illusions of the Crooked House at Himley.

Of the destruction which comes from the confidence of being able to do better, Mexico has been laudably free since the last days of Spanish rule when there was a craze for tearing out Chirrugueresque reredoses and replacing them with refined, correct and wholly alien classical structures like Georgian chimney pieces. I only met two examples of attempted improvement, the show house in Puebla which has been Hollywoodized by the Department of Arts, and a project, not yet realized, at Santa Maria del Tule which was canvassed in the following English inscription.

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[1] Mr. T. Philip Terry's popular Guide-book says of this brilliant design, "The average traveller will be inclined to think that Tolsa's real genius lay in his ability to spend so much money on so unpretentious a structure."

VISITOR!

The authority of this village, favouring the interesting plan of the Departmento Forestal y de Caza y Pesca, *tending to suppress the ugly adobe fence that surrounds this TREE, of worldly reputation, to be substituted by an artistic iron railing that does not obstruct, as at present, the integral view of the admirable GIANT, attentively invites you to help us carry on this noble end, buying the only illustrated and complete monograph that we know of the TREE. It is sold in the Secretary's office of the City Hall that I preside, in Spanish or English, at the low price of one Mexican peso each.*

The tree of worldly reputation was certainly vast, but the wall of the churchyard in which it stood was a sympathetic, rough old thing marked with the traditional Stations of the Cross, so I hope that nothing comes of the plan. Those who know the district say that there is no cause for apprehension.

Elsewhere in the world revolutionary regimes have usually been manifest in a campaign of public architecture. In Mexico City there are only two post-Diaz buildings of any real prominence. Each of them is significant.

There is the Monument of the Revolution through which most of the innumerable public processions are conducted. It is a formidable structure two hundred feet high, consisting of a single dome supported on four arches. One need not be suspected of political prejudice in condemning its startling ugliness, for it was designed for quite another purpose, to be, in fact, the central lobby of the Houses of Parliament. In 1934 the present president decided to commemorate his election and the topical scepticism of representative institutions in the same ingenious undertaking, of clothing the metal skeleton, which had stood for years, and transforming it into a triumphal arch. It is certainly one of the most tediously hideous buildings in the New World, and Mexicans of all political views regard it with the kind of fascinated horror with which Romans accept the Victor Emmanuel Memorial and which, until a few years ago, used to be devoted in London to the Albert Memorial. It is one of the sights. Another, still more recent 'sight' is the new offices of the Mexican Eagle Company. It is a very different structure, of traditional design and local material. That too was never put to its original purpose, for it was confiscated at the moment of its completion at the same time as the oil fields ; the confiscation, indeed, was delayed until the last plasterer had finished work ; it is in many ways a worthy member of the long succession of fine buildings which Mexican governments have acquired by theft. After a time, however, it became a great bore. I soon lost count of the number of times this building was pointed out to me. One passed it two or three times a day, for it stands in the main arterial boulevard of the town. Taxi drivers would swing round in their seats and say 'Aguila' ; passing strangers would stop one in the street with the same word. It was repeated with every possible inflexion of tone—chagrin, derision, triumph, indignation, awe, venom, regret, apprehension . . . for no one in Mexico City was indifferent to its fate. It seemed to symbolize the precarious condition of all their lives.

Add to this architectural background a number of squares planted with tropical vegetation and ornamented with patriotic statuary, here, as everywhere else in the world, decreasing in merit as it becomes more modern, and you have the physical scene of Mexican life ; and yet, reconstructed, say, in a film studio, it would lack a certain essential quality which is hard to describe in other terms than those of shabbiness and untidiness. It is no dirtier than many large cities ; you do not return covered in grime after a morning's shopping as you do in most English towns ; you do not see more distressing evidence of poverty than in Paris ; the smells are no stronger than in Venice. Nevertheless there is a persistent and curiously depressing air of disorder and dirt as of a seaside beach after a Bank Holiday ; the side streets tail off into waste land ; the sidewalks of the main streets are muddy and littered with cigarette ends and waste paper ; broken things never seem to get mended ; it is partly the evidence of a race who have ceased to keep up appearances, partly of an invading people who do not quite know what to do with their acquisitions. The people have a kind of listless shabbiness that has nothing to do with poverty ; they just do not bother to shave or to wear clean collars ; they are always eating ; Indian families squat in corners preparing the national dish of pancakes and pepper ; men and women wander aimlessly about in groups munching huge dripping fruits ; at the government offices pedlars display trays of delicatessen in the colonnades ; policemen and sentries have mouths covered in crumbs. The Mexican street crowds are the most inelegant I have ever seen.

By this I do not simply mean that they are not rich. It is not necessary to have big motor-cars and fashionably dressed women for a town to have style. There are no motor-cars in the old town of Fez and the women except for a few uniformed slaves are invisible, but that town has incomparable grace and dignity. There are, for that matter, quite a number of politicians in Mexico City with substantial American banking accounts ; there are numberless cars as expensive as anything one would find in Bath or Cheltenham. The sense of shabbiness comes from something uneconomic, in the way the people move and talk.

It has for some years now ceased to be a gay city. The Jockey Club, which was formerly the centre of expensive life, has been disbanded ; the gaming houses from which former presidents derived part of their incomes have been shut down ; gambling of every kind is illegal and there is a strong temperance movement, which is following the laudable programme of substituting the very excellent national beer for the spirits which were formerly the usual drink ; on public holidays the bars are shut. There is a large and formidably drab *quartier toleré*, where the licensed prostitutes, each in her separate cabin, stand all day at little guichés soliciting custom ; there is a good country club where Mexicans and foreigners mingle on cordial terms ; the drug trade which was once extensive and highly profitable is now being efficiently checked. There is one more or less respectable night-club and dancing for tourists at some of the large hotels. There is practically no private entertaining on any large scale. There is an occasional concert and an occasional week or two of opera at the great Opera House, but the building is becoming more and more used for purposes of Government propaganda. Those who come to Mexico with picturesque ideas of a voluptuous, Latin-American night life, are usually disappointed.

Films, of course, are rapidly driving out other forms of entertainment. There are Cinema Theatres doing brisk business all over the town, showing everything from the latest American products—the dialogue in English, roughly translated in a profusion of Spanish captions—to native works which specialize in costumed orchestras, funny men and a type of beauty refreshingly unlike the established models of Hollywood. Here too one can still find those serial thrillers which seem unhappily to have disappeared in Europe, which leave the hero, at the end of each installment, in positions of apparently inescapable danger from which he is effortlessly relieved the following week. Prices vary from theatre to theatre but are uniform in each house ; a concession to the Mexican's habit of destroying the upholstery when he is dissatisfied with his place and to the bull-ring tradition of climbing the barriers and invading any more expensive seats which are empty or held by people who look pusillanimous. But this is the only democratic feature of the entertainment. There seems little demand for the Russian instructional films which delight European socialists. Indeed the Mexicans seem to have a disproportionate relish for the spectacle of the stiff shirts and chinchilla that have disappeared from their own country. While I was there three films on consecutive weeks were drawing crowded houses ; all dealt with the single theme of a girl who goes to a fashionable hotel with borrowed clothes and an assumed title and ends by marrying a real millionaire. But, more curiously still, the film which had the greatest popularity was *The Drum*, a romantic story of British Imperialism in the East. How the crowd cheered when the good Highlanders shot down the bad Afridis !

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The great majority of tourists in Mexico have either come on brief, round-ticket visits or they have driven down in their own cars from the United States ; in either case their itinerary is limited to the motoring-roads which, in the tourist zone, are in good condition and so decorated with hoardings advertising international products that they might be part of England or the United States. From Mexico City one can drive in every comfort to Orizaba, Puebla, Tehuacan, Cuernavaca, Taxco and with mild discomfort to Acapulco, Guadalajara and up the great north road to Laredo. The stretch of railway from Tehuacan to Oaxaca is the only piece of line, excepting those to Vera Cruz and Laredo, which is frequented by tourists. There is an air service to Yucatan which deposits its passengers to see the ruins at Chichen-Itza, and whisks them away again as neat and fresh as they started. Travel in other parts of the country—and that is by far the larger part—is, with the exception of the oil lands, which at the time of my visit political events had virtually isolated from all except government sympathizers, as tedious and dangerous as in any inhabited part of the world. The railway system which was one of the chief achievements of the pre-revolutionary régime, was practically destroyed during the civil wars ; its return to its former owners was accompanied by labour conditions which made effective reorganization impossible. Most of it was confiscated by General Cardenas in 1937 and handed over to the workmen. The railway from Mexico to Vera Cruz is still operated by a British company in increasingly hostile conditions. It has shown no profit since the revolution and has had the utmost difficulty in maintaining its service ; the obligation to employ a redundant staff with wages and benefits enormously in excess of those paid by any native concern, make any improvement impossible ; it is, however, luxurious compared with the Puebla-Oaxaca line which embodies in their most aggravated form all the jokes people have ever made about railways. Others are said to be incomparably worse. A friend who travelled from Guatemala to Orizaba found it hard to convince people in Mexico City that the feat could be performed at all. His account of it is, I believe, eventually to be published, so I will not filch the gruesome details from him. Nor will I plagiarize from Mr. Graham Greene's harrowing description [1] of his recent expedition through Tabasco and Chiapas. My own experiences, I am afraid, were definitely homely. Those who have borrowed this book in anticipation of vicarious endurances, of treacherous guides and blistered toes, pack mules, dysentery, common or amœbic, bandits, official or outlawed, camp fires and strange encounters, must, I fear, return it to the library unread. The worst sufferings I can boast were from bed-bugs in two luxury hotels [1] and a film producer at luncheon. I was in Mexico both for a holiday and for work and both kept me in soft conditions.

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[1] *The Lawless Roads.*

Soft, let it be said, in contrast with Mr. Graham Greene's. There are more thorns than roses everywhere in Mexico. But no one wants to hear about my bed-bugs and my film producer when the country all round one was full of deadly germs and desperadoes. I can only say that the small discomforts and inconveniences that the tourist suffers are prodigally repaid by the beauty and interest of the country.

Various small incidents stand out as typical, if not of the country at least of my trip there :—

The Indian chambermaid at the simple inn at Tenancingo who, as we left, pursued my wife into the street with a 20 peso bill which she had found on the floor of our room.

The little janitor at the museum in Oaxaca who was learning English ; he had transcribed in pencil, in an awkward hand, the verses of the hymn 'All things bright and beautiful' and asked our Mexican companion to explain some of the words to him in Spanish ; I see them now against the glass cases full of Mixtec gold construing the poem together.

A very drunk mestizo at the hotel in Oaxaca. The dining-room was the former patio of the house, now roofed with glass, the floor bare tiles ; every sound swelled and echoed monstrously ; he sat with a friend shouting, spitting and singing uproariously and glaring round the room as if he expected someone to start a fight. He was quite mirthless and curiously lonely in his cups. His sober friend sat opposite him eating impassively. Presently he made the plain and slatternly waitress sit at the table with him. She tried to make him take her to the cinema ; instead he took her up to his room where he sang and shouted most of the night. I asked who he was. ' He must be a politician,' they said. ' Otherwise he would not behave like that.' Further enquiry discovered that he was a commercial traveller.

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[1] Neither, I hasten to say, both from fear of libel and in gratitude to a place where I was very comfortable, the Ritz.

A cloud of dust, a galloping horse, a swarthy figure in a wide sombrero, attended by three or four young men, more modestly mounted. The peasants in the roadsides bowed low as he passed. A brigand ? No, the parish priest coming in to say Mass. Another priest, an Englishman who, because he had been born in Mexico, was allowed to remain. He lived in the corner of a deserted cloister. The patio was waste land ; once he tried to make a garden there and found in the rubble an old fountain which he re-erected. Then he went to Mexico City for a week. While he was away the soldiers came and stole the fountain ; the people of his parish lay down in the street to stop them rolling the stone away ; but the soldiers won ; now his only ornament is a brilliant and ferocious parrot ; he has not been out of Mexico for thirty years.

A ride into the hills above Tenancingo, through pine woods, to a deserted monastery. An Indian family were housed in the porter's lodging ; it was Sunday morning and they were washing their heads in the tiled basin of a disused fountain, the lather startlingly white on their dead black hair. We walked round the garden where an elaborate system of irrigation was choked and dry and the monks' fruit trees sprawled untended, full of dead wood.

A burst tyre on the road to Puebla. While it was being mended we walked round the village ; it had once been of some size but most of the houses seemed empty now, and the garden walls were mere heaps of stone ; from above—the place sloped sharply up the hillside—one could see that it had once been carefully planned with level terraces and symmetrical, transecting streets. A great fortress-like building stood at the further side of the central square. It had once been an important college, said an old Indian ; he had been to school there himself as a child. The fathers had managed a fertile estate there where all the villagers worked. When the fathers had been sent away the village began to disappear. No one looked after the gardens now. He lived by collecting onyx on the hillside and making souvenirs for the shops in Puebla. Tourists never came his way directly and he did not try to sell anything.

Cuernavaca, two hours drive over the hills from Mexico City, where the foreign business community go for week-ends. All the villas have swimming pools and frigidaires and verandahs. It is the most uncompetitive and friendliest of communities, both to themselves and to strangers. They have the kind of mutual loyalty that comes of being under siege together. They wander in and out of one another's houses, play cards, drink cokokola and beyond an occasional joke about 'Article 33' (the enactment by which the Mexican government may expel aliens) seldom talk of their week-day worries. There is a seaside atmosphere in the foreign villas. Outside there always seems to be a wedding in progress. The women in the piazza are smarter than in Mexico City. The recreations are walking round the bandstand and revolver practice. The old shrine in the main street has quite lately been destroyed by communists. Of Borda's famous garden nothing remains except some dry, cement tanks and the great mango trees. The Cathedral and the group of buildings round it are splendid.

Taxco, the only consciously picturesque place in Mexico. Mr. T. Philip Terry becomes lyrical in his descriptions of the hotels. The one where we stayed was certainly admirable. The town is full of silversmiths' shops ; every turn of the steep cobbled streets offers a shot for the amateur photographer. The church is one of the few buildings in Mexico whose interior is finer than the exterior. Its pictures and altars have been left intact. It is the only place in Mexico where the children have learned to be impudent. It is no place for the kind of tourists we were. Either you must be very simple indeed and treat the place like Coney Island, or a resident. The residents are said to be the last survivors of the international Bohemianism of the '20s—the army of semi-intellectual good-timers who once overran half Europe ; it was, by nature, a mobile force, living on the country ; they have moved from Capri, Berlin, Villefranche, Fez, Majorca suffering mass desertions in the slump, and providing material for unnumbered light novels. At the moment they have set up their camp in Taxco—so they say in Mexico City.

Puebla, the only town in Mexico of dignity. It is hard to realize that it has constantly been a centre of revolution and that Toledano is stronger there, probably, than anywhere in the country. Every street is beautiful ; there is a good restaurant and antique shops where objects of real antiquity and beauty are for sale—(normally in Mexico ' antique ' and ' curiosity ' are synonymous terms referring to souvenirs, things as frightful there as I have ever seen anywhere in the world). The San Domingo chapel, which escapes notice in Terry's guide, is the finest of its kind in Mexico.

Chapultepec Palace. It was supposed to be shut for the day, but a soldier let us in. General Cardenas does not live there ; he has a villa of his own in a flood-lit pine grove. Chapultepec is full of memories of his predecessors ; Maximilian's chosen site, then outside the city, now a suburb ; it is his view ; his stained glass windows in the best taste of his time, the worst in the world, his trees billowing below the windows but the windows themselves bear the mark of the Republic—M.R. in frosted, public-house glass ; Diaz's billiard room and brass stair rails ; Rubio's swimming bath. The terrace is curiously like a seaside pier with glass shelters and kiosks where one expects to find cigar sellers ; Carranza and his captains used to sprawl about here in the happy vinous interlude between battle field and firing squad.

A garden in the outskirts of Mexico City with an eighteenth century grotto made of Chinese porcelain set in cement ; glimpses of crowded patios in the poor quarters ; a morning in the prison. Tourists are quite welcome there. There are workshops for about a tenth of the inmates ;

the others lie in bed or lounge about the yards and beg money from the visitors ; some of them have started small retail businesses selling sweets and tobacco. The men are allowed visits from women once a week in cells specially set aside for their meetings ; that and other humane privileges are prescribed by law ; it depends on your possession of money whether the gaolers allow them ; with money you can get most things, from cocaine to an evening's dancing at *el Retiro*. There is an English homicide there, of unsettled mentality, who is said to be often seen treating his gaolers in the fashionable bars. General Cardenas was a gaoler once and stepped into history when he liberated his only prisoner and set out in his company to join the revolutionary army.

The September crisis ; all the Mexican papers making the worst of it—*Guerra Inevitabile* on all the posters. As a result no one taking it seriously. We read that children were being sent out of London ; that they were digging trenches in Hyde Park. We thought, ' no wonder foreigners think us odd when they are told stories like that about us.' A little later thousands of people in the United States were thrown into panic by the belief that there had been an invasion from Mars ; that is how the September crisis looked in Mexico for the first few days. People with wireless sets said they had heard snatches from London ; things looked very bad there. In the Ritz bar there was a certain amount of discussion among men of military age as to how they were to get home. Then the papers came out with enormous headlines ' President Cardenas Appeals for Peace.' Shortly after that peace was arranged ; many of his supporters believed it was his doing until the American newspapers began to say it was not such a good peace after all. The war in Spain was very much more real to them than any other piece of contemporary history ; more real even than Roosevelt's New Deal. They understood the Spanish issue in Spanish terms, without any English and French and American confusions, and felt strongly about it one way or the other. It was like part of their own lives. In the vestibule of the Public Library hung a picture called ' Spain ' —a woman in travail among the bombs, painted with Indian ferocity ; a really frightful picture. There was a sweet, heady cocktail on sale at the smart bars called a ' Franco '. Even a partisan of Franco like myself, could see something ironical in these two different modes of expressing sympathy. A taxi driver had the Franco flag on the front of his car.

A week of vexations in the attempt to buy a picture. There was a large eighteenth century, stylized, decorative St. Michael on sale at Sanbornes for the very modest price of 100 pesos. They are building a church for my parish at home. It seemed to be just the thing. The lady in charge, who throughout bore my vacillations with heroic patience, warned me that there might be difficulty in getting it out of the country. It had clearly come from a church and as all Church property had been confiscated by the Government its export was forbidden ; a sensible law which has done much to preserve what *has* been preserved. We went to the Ministry of Arts for permission to take it away. They were charming and said they would send someone to look at it. Days passed and our departure became imminent. We called and telephoned ; if permission was given we should have to have it photographed and obtain a special passport for it. At last we got someone from the Ministry to see it. It was too big, he said, and tried to console us by deploring our taste ; an ugly picture, he said, of no value or interest. Then someone told us of a smuggler who could get anything one wanted out of the country. He was blandly reassuring ; yes, nothing would be easier ; he was sending a cargo of contraband at the moment ; if we could bring it at once he would have it crated up and we should find it waiting for us at San Antonio. We told him the day of our train ; it would be there in time. We paid for the picture and carried it through the streets to his office ; he was quite unembarrassed by the ostentation of its delivery. An old Indian carpenter was summoned to make a crate for it. I was to call next day, when it had been weighed, and pay for transit. I called. The smuggler was not there. His clerk said he might come that day or might not. We called repeatedly and hung about the door. At length we caught him. The picture was crated up. It would be delivered in San Antonio in a week or so. But, we protested, he had promised it for three days' time. We were going straight through to New York. Well, he said, that was impossible. Why had he not told us that before we bought the picture ? He had been busy and forgotten the date. It was all one to him whether he handled it or not ; he was only trying to be obliging.

Then the deal was off, we said. The lady at Sanbornes patiently received us. Would she take the picture back? Very well. We carried it through the streets and it was re-hung in its place in the gallery.

A lengthy dispute now began with the smuggler. Was it fair to him, he asked, to call the deal off. He had been to great trouble about it. We offered to pay for the crate and the carpenter. That, he said, was of no consequence; the carpenter was his father. But what of the risk?

The risk? Did he mean the risk of the authorities intervening.

No, no, the authorities were his friends. What of the risk he had run in housing the picture all night. Suppose his warehouse had been burned down, he would have been liable for the picture's value. It had been an anxious night for him, housing our picture. Anything might have happened. He was not pressing his claim as a business man but as one gentleman to another. He did not profit by his smuggling; he did it simply to oblige gentlemen. I said, as one gentleman to another, that I thought his anxiety exaggerated.

He began to appeal on grounds of national honour. What about the prestige of England? What would people say if it became known that an Englishman had behaved in this manner. I asked him what price he set on his anxiety. That, he said, was a matter for an English gentleman to decide for himself.

At this stage the Mexican friend who had been my support in every predicament intervened. I was handling this affair from quite the wrong angle. Did the smuggler realize, asked my friend, that England was faced with war? I was returning to fight for my King. How could I, in the circumstances, be expected to concern myself with pictures. The smuggler was moved to sudden affection. Why had I not mentioned this significant fact instead of wrangling about risks of storage. He perfectly understood my predicament. How could I go into action carrying a six foot canvas of St. Michael. Of course there could be no question between us of payment. To clinch matters I gave a peso to the porter who had done nothing in the matter except wriggle his bare toes among the shavings. This convinced the smuggler of my inherent generosity. We parted friends.

Ironically enough, when we got to the frontier, the Mexican customs officers never came into our carriage. We could have carried off a hundred pictures.

An exhilarating day in search of a *fiesta*. The bulletin issued for tourists in Spanish and English, *This Week in Mexico*, announced a fiesta at a village named Chalma. ' In part,' it said, ' it is a religious fiesta and due to the folk lore, traditions and the hundreds of Indian dancers that come from all over the country it will probably outclass other fiestas during this month.' We decided to go. Our only concern was that we should find it overrun with fellow tourists. We need not have worried.

Chalma was not on any map. Enquiry at the Tourist Bureau elicited the advice to drive in our own car to Toluca, hire another for the bad road to Tenancingo, from where it was two or three hours' ride by horse. We set out the day before. At Toluca we ate delicious little white fish cooked in black butter ; the first good food we had met in a restaurant (on our return the fish had doubled in price because, they said, some foreigners had eaten so many—ourselves). The waiter at the restaurant said it was eight hours' ride from Tenancingo to Chalma. We found a car with a negro driver. He knew a man who kept a hat shop who came from Chalma ; he would be able to direct us. The hatter said the fiesta was not at Chalma but at another village beyond, a village named Santiago, not through Tenancingo at all. It would be a beautiful fiesta. We could sleep the night at Santiago and go there next day. We drove off over appalling roads, through lovely country to Santiago, a decayed village where no one knew of a fiesta. We went to see the village priest, an old man with a full white beard who was sitting in silence in his sacristy with a younger man in shabby civilian clothes, another visiting priest. There was nowhere to stay in Santiago they said ; there *was* a fiesta at Chalma but a very small one, without dancing. The government did not allow dancing. But at the next village, the one we were going to, there would be a beautiful fiesta next day. How far was it? About two hours.

We stopped in the piazza to ask a soldier the way. How far was it? Ten minutes. It was a question I suppose of the prestige of the motorcar. It took us about half an hour. When we reached the village we found a statue of Juarez, a small church, a few houses. The Indians were decorating the church with branches of leaves. We asked about the fiesta. There would be High Mass, they said, in the morning. And afterwards? In the evening some actors were coming from Toluca to sing in a tent. Dances? No, nowadays the soldiers did not allow that outside the Church and the priests would not allow it inside. We heard afterwards that they do still dance, at these village fiestas in the yard outside the churches, but the practice has come into vague discredit and they will not talk about it to strangers. We drove on to Tenancingo and arrived there some hours after dark. An enjoyable day.

These were our holidays. There are few countries that still offer so many surprises to the tourist. But there were graver interests which have no part in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

A COUNTRY WHERE THERE ARE NO CONSERVATIVES

I

IT may be useful here to give a few notes about Mexican political history. Various names will occur and recur in the following pages. It would be tedious for the reader who is already familiar with them, to find the argument constantly interrupted by explanatory matter. On the other hand it is perhaps not discourteous to assume that some readers may be as ignorant as I was myself when the events of last Spring first excited my curiosity about the country. For their sake I will suggest, with the minimum of comment, the outlines of this historical structure of which recent incidents are a part ; the learned are invited to skip the next few pages.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico took place between the years 1519 and 1521. The land had been the scene of previous extensive invasions, the history of which is conjectural and based upon archæological inferences. The Toltec people are believed to have conquered it from the South at the end of the seventh century of our era ; to have lived there for three centuries and to have disappeared again in circumstances of which nothing is known. In the thirteenth century savage invaders from the North West overran the country. About a hundred years later a people of higher culture came, also from the North, named the Aztecs. They established themselves mainly in the valley of the Anahuac but extended their rule over a wider area. It was they whom Cortes found in occupation, with their king, Montezuma II on the throne. It has been popular in recent years to attribute to the Aztecs a higher culture than can be proved by evidence. They built massively and symmetrically, with stylized intricate ornament and statuary. Nothing that has survived is comparable either in beauty or technical skill with the art and craftsmanship of mediæval Europe. (When I read accounts of the splendour of lost civilizations, I always remember the descriptions with which the world's press was lately full of the Imperial court at Addis Ababa.) They had a system of hieroglyphic record, but no real written language ; they were ignorant of the wheel and the plough. Their ascendancy over the surrounding peoples seems to have been precarious. Cortes found ready allies in the neighbouring race of Tlaxcalans.

Cortes landed, after a preliminary brush at Tabasco, at Vera Cruz ; his force amounted to 400 men, 15 horses (animals never before seen in Mexico) and 7 pieces of artillery. Before setting out into the unknown continent he sank the fleet that had brought him from Cuba. The stupendous daring of the expedition needs no comment. Its success was helped by the superstitious expectations of the people who had a tradition that an event of the kind would occur. In 1522 Cortes became Governor, Captain General and Chief Justice over the Empire which Spain held for three centuries. In 1524 the chaplains who had accompanied his army were reinforced by twelve Franciscan friars whose duty was to convert the natives; mass baptisms took place. In 1527 Juan de Zumarraga became first Archbishop of Mexico. In 1531 the work of conversion received what is held to be miraculous sanction in the appearance of the Virgin Mary at Guadalupe.

Notions of independence began to appear among the governing class of the Mexicans towards the end of the eighteenth century. The independence of the English colonies in the North, the spread of freemasonry in the garrisons, the revolution in France, the weakness of Spain in Europe, all contributed to them. The Napoleonic era in Europe and the Peninsular War confused the issues to such an extent that it was not always clear to a Spanish official overseas where his true loyalty lay. In 1810 a parish priest, Hidalgo, led a peasants' rising which was suppressed; he was executed. In 1813 the army chiefs declared for independence. The leading general, Iturbide, became Emperor in 1822; General Santa Anna at the same time proclaimed a republic. The republicans won and Iturbide was executed.

In 1823 the Monroe doctrine was proclaimed by the United States; by this the continent of America was declared closed to European irredentism. In 1825 the last loyal Spanish garrison evacuated its post. From the death of Iturbide until the French invasion of 1861, Mexico had no settled government and in the confusion lost over half her territory, permanently, to the United States. The bankruptcy of the central government and the peculations of successive soldiers and officials, prompted a series of inroads on Church property which ended in the Reform Laws of 1859, by which Juarez confiscated all that was left. Juarez, still one of the heroes of the governing party, was an Indian from Oaxaca, an advanced radical in opinion and tenacious of character. His candidature had the armed support of the United States against the conservatives.

The French intervention of 1861–1867 had at first been intended to have an international, debt-collecting character. Spain and Great Britain, however, early released themselves from their commitments, and it became a personal adventure of Napoleon III's. Arch-Duke Maximilian of Austria had for some time shown ambitions towards historical prominence that were unsuitable in a younger son. He was induced to accept the crown of Mexico under a false impression of the tranquillity of the country. He found that those who had invited him to come represented only a faction and that the problems created by a generation of anarchy and the Juarez Reforms were not amenable to the mildly liberal, constitutional monarchy he had intended. His power and personal safety were insured only by the French troops which, in 1867, Napoleon III withdrew. Two months after they left General Porfirio Diaz took Puebla. Juarez, who had taken refuge in the United States raised a rebellion in the North. A month later Maximilian surrendered, with his loyal generals Miramon and Mejia, and in spite of protests from all over the world, was shot at Juarez's orders on June 17th. The Arch-Duchess Carlotta had gone to Europe to impress on Napoleon III the gravity of the Mexican situation ; he was fully aware of it and would do nothing more. She conceived the notion that he intended to murder her, and in Rome became finally insane, refusing to leave the Vatican for fear of her enemies ; she was thus the last woman to spend a night in the papal apartments.

General Diaz took Mexico City for Juarez and after his death became the ruler of the country for thirty-five years. During his reign Mexico became the centre of enormous foreign investment ; communications were improved and many of the towns assumed a modern industrial character. By 1906 about £200,000,000 of foreign capital was invested in Mexico ; the annual budgets showed an excess of revenue over expenditure ; currency was steady and credit high. Limantour was finance minister. A few years later the prospective wealth of the country was enormously increased by the discovery of petroleum in various districts in abundant and convenient form. In 1908 the Mexican Eagle Company was formed by the late Lord Cowdray. Other oil companies, American and Mexican owned, developed valuable properties. In 1910, Porfirio Diaz celebrated his 80th birthday and the zenith of Mexican economic prosperity.

In the same year Francisco Madero, a wealthy landowner of Spanish-Jewish origin, issued a book attacking the principle of re-election which, in effect, made Mexico an autocracy and its representative institutions meaningless. Besides this purely political consideration there was a feeling among many of the more humane Mexicans that the distribution of the new riches of Mexico was outstandingly inequitable ; the foreigners had been making huge profits, rich Mexicans had become somewhat richer ; poor Mexicans somewhat poorer ; there had been connivance at acts of enclosure of public lands committed by the large landowners. Many observers believed that Mexico was now so orderly and prosperous that the time was suitable for social readjustments that would improve the pitiable condition of the poorest class. With Diaz's increasing age the machinery of government had fallen into disrepair ; local military governors returned 'padded' army lists ; when the revolt—or rather the revolts, for there was little identity of interest or aim on the part of the rebels—against Diaz started, it was found that there was both little will to resist and little means of resistance. Civil riots and military mutinies occurred. Madero's name was that generally used by the rebels. Diaz was old and ill ; he resigned on May 25 and on the 31st left the country for Europe, where he died in exile ; he left the country rich and himself poor. On June 7th, to the accompaniment of an unusually destructive earthquake, Madero entered Mexico City in triumph.

Madero's rule lasted until February 1913 when he was murdered by the adherents of General Huerta. His period of authority was one of bitter disillusionment for himself and his sympathizers. The elements that had made the revolt successful rendered the country ungovernable. Zapata and Villa led bandit armies which successfully prevented all attempts to restore order. Madero had little administrative talent but failed largely through his own virtues of trustfulness and moderation. After his death authority was divided between rival generals and brigands, among whom President Wilson, vainly attempting to identify a suitable leader, chose Carranza. Atrocities took place all over the country ; whole States were captured by criminals ; the financial structure built up by Limantour collapsed. Foreign investors found their stocks depreciated or worthless while successive governments were obliged to adopt more and more ruthless and irregular means of raising funds. Most of the prominent figures of this decade were either assassinated or executed. In 1916 General Pershing's expeditionary force from the United States failed to capture Villa. Generals Calles and Obregon emerged as powerful leaders. Carranza was murdered in 1920 while trying to escape from the country. The Calles-Obregon group came into power with the support of the C.R.O.M., a labour union organized on Marxist principles in the industrial cities. The governing party organized itself as the Revolutionary Party of Mexico. Since then it has been the only political party in the country ; elections continue to be purely formal ; candidates for office and for places in Congress are chosen by the party chiefs ; rule is autocratic, though the autocrat continues to be subject to strong extra-constitutional pressure ; some members of the Revolutionary Party belong, and some do not, to the international communist party ; its avowed aims are substantially communist ; it is strongly anti-religious. It was powerful enough to destroy the brigand armies ; the various questions at issue with the United States, chiefly relating to damage and confiscation of foreign interests, continued to be acute. The general trend has been a pressure from below by organized labour for a more drastic policy of socialization and nationalization, resisted by the office-holders who wish to consolidate their personal careers by coming to terms with the United States. In order to pacify the C.R.O.M. (which later was eclipsed in importance by Lombardo Toledano's union of syndicates, the C.T.M.) Obregon and Calles intensified their anti-religious policy ; in 1925 the churches were closed throughout the country ; countless outrages against the religious took place during an officially supported persecution, the most famous incident of which was the execution of Father Pro, a Jesuit ; there was an armed revolt by the *Cristeros* (followers of El Cristo Rey—Christ the King). Obregon was assassinated, with unsolicited help from his own party, by a religious cartoonist named Tocal, in 1928. Calles continued the persecution of the church, but under the influence of Dwight Morrow became increasingly amenable to the requirements of foreign finance. Various party nominees held the Presidency but Calles remained the real ruler. In 1934 General Lazaro Cardenas was chosen for the six years term of office under the supposition that he would prove obedient to Calles. He quickly disappointed these expectations. First he made a tour of the country, endearing himself by his simplicity and promising substantial philanthropic innovations ; he became a personal figure instead of a party nominee. Finally, with the help of General Cedillo, he expelled Calles from the country. Cedillo retired to his property in San Luis Potosi, where he reigned as more or less benevolent dictator. He became, however, the focus for the aspirations of Cardenas's opponents. Cardenas drove him into rebellion by demanding his removal from his own territory, and succeeded in hunting him down and shooting him in the hills. Cardenas, since his accession, has fallen under the influence of Lombardo Toledano, who has convinced him that the various philanthropic reforms he wishes to introduce, can only be accomplished by a full Marxist policy ; Toledano's natural persuasiveness has been reinforced by his power as leader of most of the principal industrial and agrarian organizations. The main features of General Cardenas's policy are the nationalization of industries, most of which are foreign owned and managed, and the confiscation and division into village holdings of the private landed estates. He has encountered little resistance in the latter ; in the former, however, he finds himself at variance with the United States and other foreign governments. In March 1938 he took the grave step of confiscating the whole oil industry. He is, personally, a man of predominantly Indian blood and of simple habits ; in early middle age. He was a general at the age of 25. He has never been outside Mexico, has no oratorical powers but a gift of endearing himself with those he meets, particularly the peasants ; no one has seriously accused him of venality, though his brother is universally believed to have made a fortune by government contracts for road building. Lombardo Toledano is a lawyer of superior education ; he has visited Russia and is in touch with labour leaders all over Europe and the Americas ; he is handsome, a vigorous orator, sensitive about his personal prestige and credited by his enemies with a substantial and increasing private fortune deposited abroad. He holds no position in the government and is distrusted by the majority of the army leaders. He is said to regard himself, with some justice, as the real ruler of Mexico.

2

Questions I often asked myself during my stay in Mexico were : if one were not looking for signs of it, how much would one be aware of the very singular social and political conditions surrounding one? How far would it be possible to lead what in other parts of the world would be considered a normal life? The answer to the last question is that for a Mexican or for anyone doing business of any kind in Mexico, it would be quite impossible. The distressed condition of the country and its uncertain future affect every hour of his day. I think, too, that only a very incurious visitor could be unaware of some of the underlying confusion. Many years ago now, there was a delicious film in which Harold Lloyd, as a convalescent millionaire, arrived in a South American republic in the middle of a revolution and progressed placidly down the main street, bowing left and right, while a battle was raging round him. A few happy visitors no doubt travel through the country engrossed in the antiquities or the natural history of the place, completely oblivious of its condition ; but they must be very few. For it is impossible to talk to any inhabitant for five minutes without feeling the obsession of politics. For anyone who troubles to enquire the oddest information is constantly cropping up.

On the first day of my visit traffic leading to the Cathedral square was paralysed at midday. My companion advised leaving our taxi and walking. After passing an enormous block of cars, some drivers hooting furiously, others resigned to an indefinite wait, others causing further confusion by attempting to back out in the side streets, we came upon the cause of the trouble ; a huge procession of schoolchildren, of all ages, themselves halted and standing wistfully among their banners. Many of the groups wore distinguishing ribbons and uniforms ; the banners seemed merely to state the localities from which they came. I asked, " Is it some football match ? "

" No, it is just a demonstration of the children. They are always having them."

" What about ? "

" I'll ask." My companion asked one or two spectators who shrugged indifferently, saying it was just a demonstration. Finally he obtained the information. " It is a children's strike."

" What about ? "

" They do not like one of their teachers. They have come to protest to the President."

" They seem very well organized."

" Yes, the children's committees do that. The Ministry of Education teach them to organize like the C.T.M."

" What will happen ? "

" The teacher will be dismissed. They are always changing their teachers in that way."

Next day the newspapers had a story of a brawl between the schoolboys and some chauffeurs from an omnibus garage.

Strikes are a topic of general discussion, like the weather in England, and like it, the habitual excuse for any failure of plans. The visitor may wonder why the service is so bad even at the leading restaurants ; if he enquires he will learn that it is practically impossible for an employer to engage temporary labour ; nothing fluctuates more sharply and regularly than the tourist trade, but if a restaurateur engages a waiter for the busy months he must keep him. Under the Labour Law the least that can happen to him for discharging a man is the payment of a bonus of a quarter's wages ; it is more likely that a prolonged suit will begin ; he will be kept from his business day after day waiting for a hearing at the Labour Courts, paying his own lawyer and one for the man who is suing him, paying the man's wages while the case is pending, and at the end be obliged to re-engage him permanently. So employment drops, the tourist sits hungrily at his table or rings despairingly at his bedroom bell in his hotel, the servants who are employed are worked off their feet and everyone is the worse off. The incurious visitor may merely assume that Mexicans are not very good hotel keepers ; and that also is true.

Then there is the Museum. Every tourist visits it ; how many bother to enquire how it is managed ? Those who are told, find the story incredible. These, as I learned them, are the facts. Until a short time ago the staff was divided into two groups, both directly employed by the State. There were the specialists appointed to the various departments—archæologists, anthropologists and so on, who had mostly been trained in the United States or in Europe and knew a fair amount of their sciences ; they were very poorly paid, but it was one of the few appointments open to Mexicans of education who were not active politicians ; their work corresponded with that of similar officials in other museums; they were responsible for cataloguing, labelling, arranging, advising about new acquisitions and so forth. Below them were the floor cleaners, janitors and officials in peaked caps who lounged about the rooms guarding the exhibits and ordering foreign tourists to remove their hats. These had no pretensions to education, though in time they picked up a little dubious information from what they heard the guides telling the schoolchildren. These outnumbered the specialists. When the Cardenas régime introduced the classless era, instructions were sent out that all units of workers must organize themselves into a union, which was to be a branch of the national C.T.M. — the 'labour front' over which Sr. Lombardo Toledano presides. The Museum workers accordingly formed their union. Next they declared the Museum a closed shop and demanded that the specialists be made to join them. This, too, was decreed. The janitor is the boss; he enjoys meetings, and calls them frequently; he has the power to fine absentees which he uses with relish; the specialists have to come to his meetings, where all points of discipline and conditions of employment are debated and decided. It has just been decided that in future all promotions shall be by seniority alone and that all members of the union are equally eligible for all posts. Thus a floor cleaner may, and probably will, find himself in charge of the Mayan antiquities.

Tales of this kind—many of them no doubt exaggerated—form the staple conversation in Mexico. There is the story, which I believe to be perfectly true, of the woman who was ruined by her door-keeper. The door-keeper is an important man in the Mexican family. In the old days of large households it was keenly competed for. It carried no regular wages, but board, lodging, light work and a position of confidence that could be turned to profit in many ways. In particular he got tips for being awakened after bed time. In a patriarchal Mexican house the younger members were often anxious to conceal from their parents the hours they kept. It was a thoroughly good job. One old Indian had held this post contentedly for twenty-five years when he was caught in some unusual dishonesty and dismissed. He consulted a lawyer about the new Labour Laws and their interpretation in the hope of getting some damages. The lawyer, learning that he had received no regular wages, filed a suit against his employer for accumulated arrears at the new rates, for compensation for their having been withheld, for fines for neglect of the labour legislation, and for overtime for having been expected to get up and open the door at night i.e. for having been on duty, at work, all night, every night of his life. The total, with legal expenses came, I was told, to 40,000 pesos. And he won his case.

It is unlikely that he profited much. It is usual in such cases for lawyers to work on a commission basis which in the case of an illiterate Indian would absorb most of the winnings, or even to purchase the rights in an action for a sum down. Litigation is universal in Mexico. ‘ I have to see a man about an amparo ’ (stay of justice) is a normal polite excuse in refusing an invitation. European employers who find themselves constantly involved with the courts, get despondent about it, but I got the impression that Mexicans, on the whole, rather enjoy it. What they do not like is for the game to lose the element of chance which is so dear to them. In the old days you never quite knew what decision you would get ; it all depended on the pull your adversary had, on the bribe he had offered, and to whom. Now there is monotony in the judicial decisions. They go on purely ideological grounds. The proletarian is always right ; between proletarians the one who is nearest to the C.T.M. boss ; between bourgeois the one who is nearest to the governing gang. One of the present President's first reforms was to abolish the independence of the Supreme Court and make its personnel a government committee. Since then no appeal has been of any efficacy where politics are concerned—and politics are concerned in every branch of Mexican life. It is no exaggeration to say that to be an employer in Mexico is to outlaw oneself. It is not surprising that business of every kind is in dissolution. There are indications that Mexicans themselves are getting uneasy about their condition.

At first many of them enjoyed the spectacle of the discomfiture of the foreigners. They disliked them personally ; they resented their assumption of superiority ; they inherited a belief that their government was under foreign influence, and was being conducted for foreign advantage. There was a certain tradition of misunderstanding between foreign commerce and the Mexican educated class which has had an important influence in Mexican politics. There are of course countless exceptions. There are many English and American business men who are popular on the golf links and even in Mexican homes. There are some Mexicans who have been educated in Europe and return more pro-British than the British themselves. But, generally speaking, there is something of the Chinese mandarin about the Mexican aristocrat in his attitude to the capitalists. In the days of prosperity when the Jockey Club was the centre of an extravagant social life, few English or Americans obtained admission. Now the Mexicans are ruined and they attribute their ruin very largely (and I think unjustly) to the foreigners. They believe that most of the revolutionary confiscations took place with the connivance and encouragement of the United States, who backed Juarez against Maximilian ; first made and then drove out Huerta, and even idealized ruffians like Villa and Zapata ; who armed Calles when half the country had risen against his religious persecution, who were naturally anti-Catholic and anti-aristocratic, who took huge profits out of the country and lectured the Mexicans on their responsibilities if they went on a holiday at Biarritz ; who told successive Presidents that a redivision of land would bring national salvation, who complacently watched the ruin of the Church and of the white land-owning families ; and were now getting ruined themselves. They are too polite to put matters so bluntly but this is, I believe, the attitude of most of the Mexican upper class. It is only partly justified by historical facts, but that is their belief, and that the reason why, in the present crisis, the foreign business men found no local party to whom they could appeal.

There is a disposition, in fact, among visiting publicists to ignore them altogether or to treat them as a distressed foreign minority, like White

Russians in Paris ; to accept the centuries of Spanish rule as a closed incident and to look to pre-conquest elements for the eventual salvation of the country ; to speak severely of ‘ Indo-America ’ in place of ‘ Latin-America ’. That is the official attitude of the Revolutionary Party which finds expression in the huge and clumsy frescoes of Diego Rivera. It suits the politicians and the archæologists, but it makes nonsense of history. Mr. Gruening, for example, who is to many students the standard historian, devotes 18 pages out of 664 to the ‘ colonial period ’. But the Spanish conquest was not a process of mere economic exploitation. Mexico was part of New Spain ; for three centuries of undisturbed domination Spaniards lived, married and died in Mexico ; they mingled their blood profusely with the various native nations ; they taught the people their language, law, religion, crafts and social habits. The whole country was saturated with Spanish influence ; then the European source was cut off ; the surface became dry and dusty but below it there was still rich, moist soil ; for another century Mexico remained essentially Spanish. Four hundred years of history cannot be obliterated. The traditions of Spain are still deep in Mexican character and I believe that it is only by developing them that the country can ever grow happy.

I do not mean, of course, that it is possible or desirable to re-establish the vice-regal government, the *oidores*, and the *encomiendas*, although it was in many ways a better system than Mexico has known since. I believe, in fact, that within a hundred years Mexico will form part of the U.S.A. But I mean that for the understanding of its immediate problems fewer mistakes are made if it is remembered that the Mexicans, though they may sometimes *feel* like Aztecs or Tlaxcalans, *think* like Spaniards ; their minds have been formed on the Aristotelean model.

The position of the Spanish-Mexican families has no exact parallel anywhere in the world. At the moment they exhibit many of the defects of an aristocracy that has first been deprived of power and privilege and then of livelihood. For generations, now, there has been little inducement to them to attempt to retain the leadership of their country. Under Porfirio Diaz (1876–1911) they filled the diplomatic posts and local governorships, but the national system was purely autocratic and the army a mere police force. They were precluded by their religion from joining the Freemasons who filled the bureaucracy. Moreover they were rich. Not as rich as English or Americans or French, but comfortably provided. Diaz ensured them their incomes and left them to enjoy themselves. Diaz married into their class. It is significant that when the revolution came it was led by a man far nearer to them than to the peon—Francisco Madero, a rich, white, landed proprietor.

Diaz has been criticized since his fall by all parties—by the patriots on the ground that he parcelled up the national resources and sold them to foreigners, by the socialists on the ground that he introduced modern capitalism and kept the peasants in degraded conditions, by humanitarians because he enslaved the Yaqui Indians, by the religious because he left the problems of the Reforms unsolved.

The general feeling is that he had a unique opportunity to reconstruct the nation and that he did nothing except maintain his own authority and allow troubles to accumulate for his successors. The truth was that he set himself a simpler but no less arduous task. He should be judged as a Mustapha Kemal, not as a Mussolini. He found a country which, after two generations' experiment with independence and democracy was rapidly relapsing into savagery. For two generations the country had not known a government. For the period immediately before Diaz's assumption of power Mexico had been in the occupation of a French Army. While everywhere else in the world the ordinary amenities of civilized life had been making prodigious advances, in Mexico they had actually receded since the Spanish occupation. In particular the United States, which at the beginning of the century was on a lower cultural level than her Spanish neighbour, was now a world power of enormous wealth and potentiality. In Mexico there was no law nor national unity ; not only had she not kept abreast of mechanical advance ; in matters of communication and personal safety she had fallen behind her colonial standard. For thirty-five years Diaz maintained his personal government. He set an example, unique among Mexican rulers, in the integrity of his private life. He was a faithful husband ; he left the country rich, himself poor. He opened up the country with roads and railways, bringing law and wealth to practically unexplored districts. Above all he kept the country's sovereignty intact —at a time when statesmen were openly claiming that the natural boundary of the United States was the isthmus of Panama. He was only able to do this by maintaining the equilibrium of foreign investment ; by getting English and French to fight his commercial war with the United States. He saved his country from absorption at the very modest price of the dividends that went to European stock holders. It was a big enough achievement for one man ; as time goes on perhaps the Mexicans will come to appreciate it, but as there is not yet a single memorial to Cortes, and his most lovely relic, the old church at Tlaxcala has lately been ruined, perhaps this is too much to hope. (Though, come to think of it, is there anywhere in England a memorial to Julius Cæsar ?) At the end of Diaz's reign, when his powers were weakened, he began to concern himself with the problem of a successor and for the moment toyed with the idea (as Kemal did with disastrous results for those who took him seriously) of a constitutional opposition. Mexicans of the time, who had grown up under him, and knew the boredom and inevitable abuses that grow in an autocracy, who had never known the bad days of Juarez, wished to see their country conforming still more closely to the contemporary fashion ; they had seen general elections at Stonyhurst and knew them to be lively and bonhomous occasions. So party politics were reintroduced with pleasant expectations of candidates competing with benevolent projects and a party loyalty finding expression in coloured rosettes and rotten eggs. The result has been twenty-five years of graft, bloodshed and bankruptcy. Hardly a single prominent figure in the history of Mexico in the last generation has escaped a violent death ; Salas, Reyes, both Maderos, Suarez, Villa, Carranza, Obregon, Orozco, Zapata—the catalogue is almost complete. Now and then a politician gets across the border in time, either to wealthy exile like Calles or to imprisonment and death like Huerta. The constitutional opposition to which the opponents of Diaz aspired, has never come into existence. There is still one political party in Mexico, now the Revolutionary Party ; seats and offices are appointed at party headquarters as in all totalitarian states. The only difference between the Mexican system and the Fascist is that the nation has sacrificed its political liberties without getting internal security or foreign prestige in exchange. Thus it is not surprising that a political career has now few attractions for Mexicans of decent principle. It is difficult to say where the fault lies when the government of a country gets into the hands of its worst elements ; there is a natural trend of all political forms in this direction. Those who have wearied of democratic forms forget that history is full of instances of legitimate royalty being ruled by corrupt courtiers; English Whigs in the eighteenth century enriched themselves from the public purse ; it is not only in France and the United States that the worst men may get to the top. What is certain, however, is that there is a Gresham's Law active in public life ; bad rulers drive out good. In France and the United States it is unusual for respectable citizens to go into politics. In Mexico it is at the moment unknown.

In the United States, however, there is trade as an honourable activity and a source of power ; in France there is an army. But in Mexico trade is almost all in foreign hands and the army has a very odd position. There is no recent military tradition among the Spanish Mexicans. The army forms an independent estate with a relationship to the Government and the people which it is impossible for a foreigner to understand.

In the ordinary way it is extremely unobtrusive. One sees far fewer soldiers about the place than in most European countries. Every town has its barracks—(usually a convent appropriated 'for charitable purposes'; many churches show signs of recent military occupation—bayonet cuts in the pictures, the ashes of camp-fires made from choir stalls, etc.)—on days of national importance the streets are lined and paraded with glum, fairly smart little figures in uniform; there are guards in field uniform—tin hats and bandoliers—at most government offices; on the main roads one passes little pickets, quartered in peasant huts, employed most of the day in cooking and eating; very, very rarely a high officer appears at a night club where, if sober, he sits shyly in a corner, suffering uncertainty about his knife and fork. But one does not get the impression of a country in which the military are predominant. That, however, according to everyone who ought to know, is the case. It is in the army that revolutions start; it is from the army that rulers rise—General Cardenas, for example. And the army is a very unusual force indeed. It is strongly anti-Catholic, pro-Freemason, anti-aristocratic, anti-foreign. Since the reforms of General Amaro it is highly disciplined—almost ascetic. One hears of local Generals who maintain a feudal state, rather like Abyssinian Rases, but for the most part they live rough. The officers are recruited from the half-caste minor bourgeoisie; they go to military schools at an early age and imbibe certain Spartan virtues and vices. The men are pure Indian, recruited in the villages, usually, I am told, by forcible methods. Once enrolled they find themselves detached from the village, the soil, the family, and the parish which have hitherto been the basis of their lives ; they seem to accept the new attachment placidly enough. Their loyalty, like that of 'native troops' all the world over, is to their immediate superiors. When the officers declare against the government they march with them. They are inspired by the commander's prestige and popularity which seem to have singularly little dependence on his qualities of justice and humanity, or even on his courage and military skill. If the general is successful they get a kind of vicarious satisfaction ; if he loses they either take to the hills with him or wander home to their villages. All the fighting they have seen or heard of or are likely to see or hear of is against fellow Mexicans.

The civil service, which includes the schoolteachers, is appointed purely on political grounds and reflects the opinions of the governing group in Mexico City. The personnel are subject to close scrutiny in their private lives and are liable to expulsion if, for instance, they are seen to practise their religion. Most of them are mere clerks who find it convenient to profess whatever is the current governing philosophy. Many of them are alarmed at the direction General Cardenas's policy is taking ; practically all, if they could keep their posts by so doing, would readily support an opposite policy if an opposition came into power. The whole-hearted doctrinaire communists seem mostly to be employed in the office of education, but even here there are many courageous malcontents who give secret religious instruction to their pupils.

The lawyers are an able and influential class. Apart from the endless litigation which is a feature of Mexican life, they occupy themselves prominently with political controversy in the press. There are many prominent socialists among them. Lombardo Toledano, the head of the C.T.M., the federation of trades unions which is the chief political force in the country, is a lawyer. The judges, as has been mentioned above, are now political nominees, but the bar is predominantly against the Government, largely no doubt for professional reasons ; the presence of the foreign business concerns in Mexico has been a source of splendid revenue to them.

The doctors are said to be highly competent, though the best of them still go abroad for their training. They have for a long time enjoyed a privileged position under the Revolution. Foreigners are forbidden to compete with them. Many of them owe their places to C.T.M. appointment. Medical service is one of the directions in which General Cardenas promises—though up to now he has accomplished very little—unlimited expansion. Hospitals are all in Government hands. They may, therefore, be said to support the present regime as a profession, although individually many are becoming apprehensive.

The shopkeepers and small manufacturers are uniformly allied with the foreign business interests. A large number of them are themselves foreign—German and Jewish principally, but drawn from all races, even Chinese and Syrian. They have suffered most from recent events. They are, however, unorganized and, at the moment, without influence.

The priesthood will be dealt with in a later chapter. They have been driven into the life of the catacombs. They are, of course, opposed to their persecutors but it is generally believed that their political power is completely broken.

These are, roughly, the political groupings of the elements from which a national opposition to General Cardenas might be expected to arise. At present time there is no open opposition of the kind which flourishes in a democratic country, and when one questions those who are most bitter in their complaints of the regime as to how they hope to see it altered, the answer nearly always comes back to the Army.

Judged by recent European standards Mexico seems to be in the condition where a Fascist party is due to rise and conquer. There is a historical cycle which is now becoming familiar and seems almost a part of industrial development ; a cycle in which at certain moments malignant non-economic forces are decisive. There is the first phase when labourers, accustomed to a low standard of living and employed in a kind of work which makes only modest profits for their overlords, are employed for the same wages on work which provides enormous profits ; this is usually called exploitation. Next comes the phase when the workmen realize their importance and the disproportionate nature of their rewards ; they successfully claim a larger and larger share of the profits until the employers are gaining the bare margin which gives an inducement for further capital investment in that particular quarter ; with the share in the profits comes an increased opportunity for the workmen to rise to higher economic classes and to become, themselves, employers ; the increased purchasing power of the new wages and the taste for a wider range of commodities induced by the new social aspirations, make the marginal profits, in gross, considerable ; that is liberal capitalism. Then the devil comes into it. As legitimate trading ceases to offer sensational profits the taste for gambling in fictitious values grows on the part of the rich with consequent sudden fluctuations of prosperity and employment, while at the same time the demands of the workmen cease to be temperate, are political in character instead of economic, and become frivolous and vindictive ; that is what is popularly known as the class war. The middle class suffers from both sides and sees itself threatened by extinction while at the same time those whose interests are not exclusively economic and class-conscious, are ashamed at the ignominious aspect their country has in the world at large ; there is an ebullition of semi-mystical feeling for race and nation combined with an ascetic disgust for people who compete only for physical comforts. Self-preservation and patriotism combine to produce Fascism. Then the devil comes into that, too ; cranks and criminals get into power in the new regime ; the patriotic motive becomes neurotic ; a people constantly maintained in a condition of high excitement by demagogy has to find some food for its nervous appetite more tasty than draining marshland and maintaining a punctual train service ; the nation embarks on a war of expansion, is ruined and reverts to those simple standards of life when, in due course, it will be ready for the cycle to start again with a fresh era of exploitation.

This cycle is, of course, largely conjectural. Mexico has seemed to conform to it in recent years but in her case there are further complications. First, the disparity between the urban proletariat and the peasant is enormous ; industrial conditions and communist propaganda have brought the factory workers to a condition more or less analogous with those of pre-Fascist Italy and modern France ; the peons on the land have no counterpart in Europe ; they belong to another historical era. Secondly, the larger industries are almost exclusively owned and managed by foreigners, so that a purely nationalist movement would not seek its allies, as it has done in Europe, among the industrial magnates. Thirdly, Mexico is used to misgovernment. That is perhaps the most dismal feature of all. A whole generation has grown up since the fall of Porfirio Diaz who has known nothing but pillage, graft and degeneration. It is not shocking to them to hear of scandals in high places ; they are not disappointed when promises are repudiated ; they have grown accustomed to seeing everything working rather less well year by year. They lack the spur to action which comes from exasperation at seeing something misused which they have seen in proper order. Many of the more thoughtful of them have come to the conclusion that there is no cure for their ills. It is not unknown in history for the jungle to recapture its lost provinces ; one can see it happening, today, in the West Indies. It is only by unremitting, concerted defence and counter-attack that man retains his place on the earth. Many Mexicans, and those some of the most honourable and disinterested among them, have despaired of the effort.

CHAPTER FOUR

OIL

I

THE National Museum was full of schoolchildren. Crocodiles threaded their way from Huitzilopochtli to Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, Chac-Mool and Teotihuacan, pausing and stopping at the command of their guide, gazing about them with that air of sullen bewilderment common to schoolchildren in museums in all parts of the world. An eager, English-speaking guide had attached himself to me in the courtyard.

" There are too many children," he remarked.

" Yes."

" It is their holiday."

Together we struggled to the huge Calendar Stone which is the hall-mark of the more expensive souvenirs. You can get the Calendar Stone in china as an ash-tray, or in gold the size of a threepenny bit on a ring, or in silver the size of a soup-plate as a salver ; you can even get it—oddest of all commemorative conceits—engraved on an onyx egg, but no one knows what it means. Ingenious, cross-word minds have played with this 24 ton puzzle for 150 years and devised various explanations flattering to its Aztec carvers. It has been the base of a patriotic claim that before the Spanish conquest, the Indians had advanced beyond Europe in the science of chronology. We stood and looked at this stone ; the schoolchildren swarmed round us.

" It is better to see this very interesting stone early in the morning," said the guide. " There are some beautiful objects in the room across the patio."

We passed into a very nice jumble of bric-a-brac : costumes, snuff-boxes, Imperial regalia, lace and needlework . . . " This," said my guide, " is one of the swords of Maximilian's bodyguard."

It was one of those triple daggers, ornamented with cairngorms and silver thistle, that form a part of Highland full-dress. Heaven knows how it had found its way here (or did Maximilian keep a piper ? I have not seen him mentioned in any of the biographies, but it is quite conceivable that he imported the idea from Balmoral in his romantic Miramar period.)

" That has come from Scotland," I said.

" Scotland ? "

" A part of Great Britain."

" Ah." This gave my guide the chance to satisfy himself on a point that had been puzzling him for some time. " You are not American ? "

" No, English."

" The English are more elegant."

" Yes."

" They have more nobility than the Americans."

" Very true."

" I am surprised to see an Englishman here since we took your oil. What do they think in England about that ? . . ."

The eternal question, with which all conversations in Mexico began and ended : what was the

British Government going to do? What did the British people feel about it? The true answer, I suppose, was that though there was only one large international question for the Mexicans, there were a hundred for the British Government. We had stated our views uncompromisingly and were quite prepared to wait a year or so before discussing them. And as for the feelings of the British public, these are only aroused when they see politics in simple terms of underdog and oppressor. They have not yet got used to thinking of British Companies as underdogs. Moreover the confiscations had been accompanied by a number of potent phrases about democracy. If the Japanese, or Nationalist-Spaniards, or Germans or Italians had taken our oil, then there would have been a series of meetings in the Albert Hall; but the Mexicans had a Left Book Club vocabulary. It so happened that the Mexican regime showed features which elsewhere would be damning: the government was autocratic; the autocrat was a General; there was only one political party; educational appointments were political and the teaching purely state-propagandist; history books were being edited on the lines of nationalist self-assertion . . . Some of the British public knew these things, some did not; but to the politically minded, vocal minority, one thing was of paramount importance: when the Mexicans saluted their bosses they raised the arm with clenched fist, not with extended fingers. So they were all right; they were democrats, like ourselves and the French.

It is true that the majority of Englishmen do not think in quite such simple terms, but it is the minority who edit the weeklies and hold meetings in Trafalgar Square. It is they who are quoted as expressing 'British opinion'. Sober citizens had more on their minds than Mexico in the summer of 1938. The Oil Question, however, makes a very nice working model of a modern international-economic problem. It has practically all the features of the larger problems that are disturbing our lives and may be examined conveniently in the large, but not overwhelming, volume of conflicting propaganda that has been issued by the opposing sides.

The main facts are not in dispute. On March 18th, 1938, General Cardenas, by Presidential decree, confiscated the properties of a dozen or more oil companies representing British, Dutch, American and other foreign shareholders valued by them at about £80,000,000. Since that date his action has been confirmed by judicial decisions and amplified by the executive officials to include business premises in Mexico City and the Isthmus which had no direct connexion with the production or sale of oil. The decree of expropriation was, in form, the General's answer to the refusal of the companies to accept the award of the Mexican Labour Board in a dispute between them and their employees. The British Foreign Office, unsupported by the State Department at Washington, protested on April 8th, in a note from which the following salient points may be quoted :

> " *His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom do not question the general right of a Government to expropriate in the public interest and on payment of adequate compensation ; but this principle does not serve to justify expropriations essentially arbitrary in character . . . The Mexican Eagle Company were,*

as a result of various proceedings in law, confronted with an award rendered by the Labour Board and confirmed by the Supreme Court, which was not in the view of His Majesty's Government justified on the facts . . . Essential evidence had been improperly excluded, inadequately considered and unjustifiably overridden by experts and the Labour Board ; which evidence was directed to show that the figures of profits and costs of the Company subsequently adopted by experts and the Labour Board were erroneous . . . His Majesty's Government are fully satisfied that the conditions following for non-compliance with the award are not such as have warranted the adoption of such a drastic and far-reaching measure as expropriation. The severity of this harsh and arbitrary step was out of all proportion to the exigencies of the situation which it was allegedly designed to meet and went far beyond what was necessary if the real object which the Mexican Government had had before them was merely to secure the execution of the award and what, in their view, would be fair treatment for the wage earners . . . His Majesty's Government have looked in vain for any explicit and adequate statement of such public interest as would be served by nothing less than expropriation ; nor do they think it could have been demonstrated that any such public interest existed.

"*. . . His Majesty's Government . . . find difficulty in escaping the conclusions that the real motive for the expropriation was a political desire to acquire for Mexico in permanence the advantages of ownership and control of the oil fields ; that expropriation was tantamount to confiscation carried out under a veil of legality formed by basing it upon labour issues ; and that the consequences have been a denial of justice and a transgression by the Mexican Government of the principles of international law.*

> " *His Majesty's Government see no way in which this situation can be remedied but by the restoration of its properties to the Company itself. This His Majesty's Minister is instructed hereby formally to request.*"

The Cardenas Government replied on April 12th.

> " . . . *The Mexican Government cannot do other than point out that, even on the assumption that numerous British investors are very much interested in the situation in which the Company finds itself, the latter is a Mexican enterprise, and therefore the defense of its interests does not appertain to a foreign State . . . The Mexican Government cannot in any way admit the unjustified limitation which it is sought to place on the right of expropriation . . . The expropriation decree must be appraised separately and must be adjudged legal and valid in itself, although it is recognized that the circumstances preceding it made expropriation indispensable . . . The ground of public interest which led directly to it was created in this case by the contempt of court on the part of the companies in the face of a decision rendered by the highest court of the land . . . The firm determination to pay for the properties expropriated has been declared publicly before the whole world and the Republic's capacity to pay is a real and certain fact . . . It cannot be said that there was a denial of justice, so long as the legal resources which the company have for their protection have not yet been exhausted before the Mexican Courts.*"

As the result of a further exchange of notes in which certain technicalities were disputed and the fundamental disagreement of the two governments accentuated, diplomatic relations were severed, on the initiative of the Mexicans, on May 13th. Legal proceedings to set aside the expropriations were protracted for months, without hope of redress on the part of the companies. The Mexican Courts enjoy far less independence than those of Nazi Germany, and in recent years have never been known to give a decision, in a matter concerning politics, that was not in accordance with presidential instructions, but the tedious and expensive farce had to be played out, to satisfy the Mexican objection that a denial of justice could not be pleaded so long as there were legal means of appeal open. The proceedings were voluminous and, to the lay mind, futile. No one expected impartial justice to result ; no one was surprised by a series of decisions, some of which violated the law, some of them commonsense, and some both. Mexicans are nimble advocates ; they settled down to the case luxuriously, like gluttons to a feast. The height of fantasy was reached when the Supreme Court decided that the Companies were guilty, not only of contempt of court, which was technically arguable, but of breach of contract with their employees. The men, no one disputed, had occasioned the quarrel, by striking for a new collective contract when they were already bound by a series of contracts, most of which had some time to run after the date of the stoppage. The Supreme Court, however, held the Companies guilty of breach of contract and liable, not only to the payment of three months' pay but of an undefined but potentially vast compensation. Presumably, in dictating this judgment, the President hoped that, in whatever final reckoning might be made, this sum might, somehow, be introduced into the balance as an asset, and written off as an instalment or as the bulk of the compensation which he had promised to pay. But the lawyers had translated the question to a world of make-believe.

Men, in their attitude to law, may, nowadays, be divided into those who believe that if an act is legal, it is irrelevant whether it is just and expedient, and those who believe that if it is just and expedient, it is irrelevant whether it is legal. Few identify the terms, for respect for Law, as such, is the survival of a much earlier age and of another conception of Society. Then the Ruler was conceived of as someone holding a commission to enforce the Law. Law was the inherited, and in many systems divinely revealed, wisdom and morality of the people. The good king was the one who administered it ; the bad king let it be broken or broke it himself; he was himself the subject of the Law, not its creator. Nowadays, however, Law is merely a formulation of the whims of the party in power. It is used for social experiment ; it is ' tried out ' on the people and lightly abandoned if it proves unpopular. Rulers come into power largely on their promises to make new laws or repeal old ones. As a consequence law has become intensely provincial. It has followed the general break-up of international concepts. In the drying up of civilization, cracks appear and widen ; the parched nations shrink away from one another. It becomes, year by year, more difficult for people of one nationality to make their homes among those of another. When a man voluntarily submits himself to the law of the land in which he is living, he cannot predict the implications of his submission. He is prevented from taking any part in forming a system which may change dizzily. This is true among the great and stable powers ;

it is of graver consequence in a country like Mexico where any hooligan may get into power, govern by decree, and assume, by his own dismissals and appointments, a judicature who will give his decrees any interpretation that an emergency may require. Thus the question of whether Mexican executive actions can be reconciled with Mexican legislation is purely academic ; a source of revenue to the overcrowded Mexican bar ; an opportunity for personal recrimination in the Mexican weekly papers ; but a barren topic as far as practical politics are concerned.

Thus all serious political discussion, today, must employ extra-legal terms. It was, I believe, abundantly proved in the Mexican Courts, that the act of expropriation violated the laws and the constitution, but these are not the grounds on which the ordinary English or American observer will find his interest aroused. Some, indeed, have their minds already closed to discussion. There is the purely nationalist preconception on either side, which is unshakable ; the English—pretty few of them in these days—who believe that the world was created to supply the English with physical comforts, and that the armed forces of the Crown exist to ensure the regular payment of dividends—'if the dagoes don't like it, damme, what's the Fleet for ? ' There are the Mexicans—thousands of them—who believe that the soil of the country and anything on and below it, was ordained for the exclusive use of the heterogeneous peoples who have been born there ; that this possession is inalienable and that any use made of it by a foreigner is an act of theft. Besides these, there are the ideologues, to whom all capitalists are outlaws ; they believe that a state of war exists between employer and employed ; that any gain for one is a corresponding loss to the other ; that all profits are stolen from wages and that there is no solution to the differences that arise, except the extermination of the rival party. With these there is no arguing. But beyond either group remain those who believe that mechanical industry and private property can cause both harm and good, and that each case must be judged on its merits. To these the significant questions are : Did the foreign oil companies establish themselves piratically in Mexico ? Did their presence retard the peaceful development of its political and social life ? Were the workers in the oil fields neglected and underpaid, and their recent demands based on bona fide social grievances ? Was the destruction of the companies the only way of satisfying them ? Has the Government any intention of paying compensation ?

2

Petroleum is, next to the Cinema, the youngest of the great industries of the world and, unlike it, the most highly organized ; for the outsider to attempt to disentangle all the ramifications of allied and subsidiary companies is like tracing the marriages of the royal families of Europe. After a period of intense and very nearly disastrous rivalry during the early years of the century, the numerous private concerns which had begun to deal in oil, decided to combine. Prospecting, mining, refining, and marketing are now co-ordinated by enormously wealthy international groups, whose ramifications are so wide that in many minds they have come to bear a slightly sinister connotation. No doubt this is largely due to the fact that besides being an essential of almost every branch of civil life, oil is also a primary requisite in time of war. By a rare beneficence of providence it so happens that the nations who are at the moment credited with the most war-like disposition, are deficient in oil. But it also happens that the sources of oil are, with the exception of those of Russia and the United States, located in small countries who could not hope to maintain their independence by force unaided, and the strong, peaceful powers control the supply, by arrangements more or less analogous to the one lately repudiated by Mexico. Now these small countries are watching events in Mexico with keen interest. If she is successful in her experiment, they will be tempted to imitate her, and a change in the balance of power may result which will prove the deciding consideration in the unresolved question of whether the war-like powers will settle down to exploit what they have already gained, or push on to further, cataclysmic adventures. This is indeed a sinister aspect and it must be remembered when the industry is being treated as a purely commercial organization.

But even as a commercial organization there are certain unique features about the petroleum industry. The potential profits are vast ; so are the potential losses. It is a highly speculative business in which it is impossible to predict any relation between capital expenditure and the return. Prodigious sums are spent yearly—and must be spent if production is to be maintained—

on the exploration of new fields, which often prove entirely fruitless. It is a business on which only very rich corporations can embark with any reasonable hope of success. The stories of small farmers and Indian villagers who find themselves boundlessly wealthy overnight are romantic material and are copiously used as such by dramatists and scenario-writers ; but the real history of the oil industry has been made by arduous, unremitting prospecting, financed by companies who can bear the losses because of their occasional disproportionate gains elsewhere. A small state with a precariously balanced budget could not conscientiously undertake the risks of exploring its own resources out of revenue.

Moreover, petroleum is one of the very few industries who serve the general interest by standardization. The civilized man, today finds the world intolerably monotonous in detail ; he travels from country to country, continent to continent, and finds the same firms in almost identical buildings displaying uniform mass-products to uniform, mass-clothed, mass-educated customers. The spectacle is so depressing that he is apt to forget that there are occasions when standardization is desirable. There is everything to be said for regional cookery, regional architecture, regional craftsmanship, but nothing for regional petrol. The car user wishes to be sure that he can get the identical petrol to which he is accustomed, every ten miles, for thousands of miles and that is what the organization of the companies assures him. He wants, moreover, to be sure of a constant price. Large and erratic fluctuations in the price of oil would be an annoyance to the private driver ; they would be disastrous to the numerous industries who depend on it for their power. If petroleum were improvidently mined and marketed by competing small companies and small states, there might, at the cost of great dislocation and unemployment in the industry itself, be a fall in price for a few years. There are a number of wells which, once they have been found, produce petroleum copiously and easily, with working costs which would enable them to sell at a very low price ; at present these profits are being absorbed into the industry to balance less successful districts and finance further exploration. Should the industry disintegrate and fall into the hands of competing small companies or governments these sources would speedily be exhausted ; in a year or two there would certainly be a sharp rise in price, possibly a world shortage of oil ; a condition which, in the rather precarious economic balance of the world, might well precipitate another vast wave of unemployment. It is not conceivable that a group as improvident and corrupt as the politicians now controlling Mexico would resist the temptation to make immediate profits where it could, or that even supposing that some provision was voted for exploration, the sums granted would ever be properly employed for that purpose. It is to the interest of the world at large that the oil industry should remain an international state, as in effect it is today, and as it certainly would be in the ideal Marxist world. The profits accruing to private individuals are a cheap price to pay in exchange for coherence and stability. But to admit this is not to settle the particular problem that has arisen in Mexico. It often happens with human organizations that though generally beneficent in purpose, they are mishandled in practice. It would not be surprising if by reason of its great power and resource, the international oil industry were ruthless in individual cases. Was this the case in Mexico and has General Cardenas hit upon the happiest solution? We are thus back at the six questions from which we digressed.

3

Did the oil companies, as is commonly asserted, establish themselves piratically in Mexico? The answer, so far as the British interests are concerned, is that they came with every encouragement from the existing government and were at great pains to satisfy every lawful requirement of title. Impersonal corporations are at a disadvantage in dealing with dictators, in that the latter can deny all continuity with their predecessors. General Cardenas, for example, chooses to regard his advent into Mexican politics as the initiation of a new, apocalyptic regime of righteousness and joy. Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin (who would no doubt courteously include Lenin) live under the same rosy illusion. It makes government, in certain respects, vastly more simple if you can repudiate previous history. The fact remains, however, that the oil companies came to Mexico less than forty years ago with the full encouragement of the President, Porfirio Diaz. His successors, transient and often fugitive figures, have been willing from time to time to sign away for ready cash concessions that were not theirs to give. Diaz, at the beginning of the century, was the undisputed ruler of a very prosperous republic. He was the one man since the expulsion of the Viceroys, who could without affectation, claim to speak with authority for the whole Republic. He was, however, antecedent to the Cardenas Six Years Plan and all his acts are now officially anathema.

The man who created the Mexican Eagle Company was very far from being the penurious adventurer who, in popular fiction, seeks his fortune among backward peoples. He was, in fact, the greatest figure in Mexican development, second only to the President in importance and esteem.

Weetman Pearson (later Viscount Cowdray) went to Mexico for the first time at Christmas 1889. He was already one of the most prominent engineers of his time, the head and sole motive force of the firm that had successfully executed great engineering works in many parts of the world, and a man of substantial private fortune. He came to Mexico at the President's invitation to cut the Mexican Grand Canal, the largest public work yet undertaken in the Republic. This contract was the beginning of an association with the country which ended only in his death, during which he left his mark on every aspect of the national organization. His largest works in Mexico were the reconstruction of the Tehuantepec Railway, and the construction of its terminal ports, Salina Cruz and Coatzacoalos which until the opening of the Panama Canal, provided the main transcontinental route from Atlantic to Pacific, and the creation of a new port at Vera Cruz, where, under his impulse the old city was cleansed, its streets repaved, water and drainage supplied—work so well done as to withstand 25 years of wanton neglect ; it is only now beginning to relapse into its original squalor. Wherever his operations moved, improved sanitation followed. He set a new standard of healthy living conditions, draining swamps, clearing bush, tapping sources of pure water. His object was not primarily philanthropic ; these things were the requirements of efficient labour and appeared as by-products of his work. The conditions of his labour gangs were not up to the standard of modern European developments, but they were superior to anything yet attempted in Mexico. He worked in close association with the President who found in him and his staff men who could be relied on to keep their word and overcome difficulties rather than plead them as excuses for evading their obligations.

It was not until 1901 that Pearson turned his attention to oil, and he came to the subject without any previous acquaintance with its complexities. More than once there were rumours that he was ruined, which approximated nearly to the truth ; only his perseverance, his great financial resources, his ability to learn quickly from experience, and a little luck, brought him to final success. The story of the venture is told in detail by Mr. J. A. Spender in the official biography.

He needed oil for the use of his locomotives on the Tehuantepec Railway ; his surveyors had lately reported local seepages on the Isthmus near San Cristobal on a tributary of the Coatzacoalos River and at a place on the River Pedregal further East. These reports were no doubt in his mind when, stopping for a day at Laredo in Texas, he found the place in a state of wild excitement over the discovery, two months before, of the famous

Lucas Gusher at Spindle Top. This fired his imagination and he promptly cabled his agents to secure options on large areas round his properties where oil had been observed. These instructions were amplified later from New York. He engaged the engineer who had made the lucky drilling at Spindle Top and with the least possible delay had begun the development of the San Cristobal-Capoacan field. He quickly learned, however, that the discovery of oil was only the first stage of the undertaking which needed a continuous series of successes to make profitable ; the crude oil had to be controlled, refined, conveyed and sold. For a long time expenses greatly exceeded the returns. In 1902 he was talking of ' cutting his losses and clearing out ' when he had spent £1,500,000. Before the end he had spent three times this sum. It was not until 1906 that he felt justified in erecting a refinery and tankage, at the cost of a further £500,000. It was not until 1908 that the refinery began work.

Pearson soon gave up the idea of cutting his losses and clearing out. He had learned the first principle of the industry, that it must be conducted on a huge scale, or not at all. In 1906 he obtained concessions from the Federal Government and the State Governments of Vera Cruz, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, Tabasco and Chiapas for further exploration and exploitation rights. In March 1906 he owned about 600,000 acres of oil land and had 200,000–300,000 acres more on royalty leases. These were not obtained by mere strokes of the Presidential pen, as is popularly believed in Mexico. A staff of lawyers was continuously employed for years verifying titles and scrutinizing the transfers.

The records of land-ownership were often inextricably confused ; every kind of fraudulent imposture was attempted on the Englishman who had gone into the market so extravagantly for land that had hitherto been held as valueless.

And still the business showed no profit. Drilling had been continuous but San Cristobal remained the only workable field as yet discovered. San Cristobal only promised a two years' life and in those two years things grew worse instead of better. Pearson went in for marketing oil in competition with the American firm of Waters Pierce who up till then had enjoyed a profitable monopoly in Mexico ; when the produce of his own fields fell short of the market commitment, he was obliged to buy and import ; he soon found himself buying more than he produced. In June 1909 he bought 400,000 barrels of oil from Texas, while the input of his refinery was down to 3,000 barrels a day. A further field at Furbero which was allied with Pearson proved a disappointment. In the end, when success did come, it was not in the Isthmus where he had originally started, but 400 miles north of it, where he had not been particularly hopeful. In January 1910 a shallow, highly productive well was struck at Tanhuijo and in February Potrero No 1 gave promise of a rich field. Now, after he had borne all the costs and anxiety himself, Pearson for the first time felt justified in coming before the public and in May the Mexican Eagle Company made its first public issue of shares.

In December of the same year Potrero No 4 was struck ; a mine that has become famous among oilmen. For two months it ran to waste at a rate of 100,000 barrels a day, before the engineers could succeed in getting the immense flow under control. This well ran for eight years before it was exhausted and yielded over 100,000,000 barrels, having narrowly escaped total destruction in 1914 when it was set on fire by lightning and burned for seven months. It was the discovery of Potrero 4 which proved decisive in the competition with Waters Pierce Company, which until then was going none too favourably for Pearson. With the end of this conflict, on Pearson's terms, came the beginning of the great system of commercial alliances of which the Mexican Eagle now forms a part. By 1918 Mexico had become the second greatest oil-producing country in the world. It has recently lost its position for reasons which will appear later. Oil is still there when conditions allow its production. The history of its discovery is not the familiar cinematographic tale of the destitute heroine finding a fortune on her mortgaged farmyard and living happily ever afterwards, but it is, in its own way, just as exciting.

4

Did the oil companies exercise a malevolent influence on local life and politics?

Last summer a naïve little pamphlet named *The Good Neighbor*, by Mr. Oscar Morineau was being distributed free in Mexico City to tourists, who looked as though they might have bourgeois sympathies. Other, more outspoken literature was kept for fellow socialists. The thesis which Mr. Morineau had been turned on to defend was that Mexico was not communist, still welcomed private enterprise and further foreign capital investment, but had been driven to drastic action in the particular case of the oil companies because of their licentious behaviour. '*The origin of the oil industry in Mexico*,' he says, '*is stained with blood, violence, plunder, corruption and intrigue of all kinds. We may forget crimes and mistakes of the past, provided the organization or industry committing them later justifies its existence from a social point of view. Unfortunately the oil companies did not have the necessary foresight to co-operate in the development of the regions in which they operated . . . they left no traces of culture . . . only saloons and places of prostitution flourished . . . we are firmly determined to prevent private enterprises from becoming positive factors of corruption.*'

General Cardenas in his broadcast message to the nation, of March 18th, 1938 said '. . . *Another inevitable consequence of the presence of the oil companies, strongly characterized by their anti-social tendencies, has been their persistent and improper intervention in national affairs.*'

'*The oil companies' support to strong rebel factions against the constituted government in the Huasteca region of Vera Cruz and in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec during the years* 1917 *to* 1920 *is no longer a matter for discussion by anyone. Nor is anyone ignorant of the fact that in later periods and even at the present time, the oil companies have almost openly fanned the ambitions of elements discontented with the country's government . . . They have had money, arms and munitions for rebellion . . . but for the progress of the country, for establishing an economic equilibrium with their workers through a just compensation of labour, for maintaining hygienic conditions . . . they have neither money nor the desire to subtract it from the volume of their profits.*'

A few days earlier, Sr. Lombardo Toledano, speaking to the C.T.M. General Congress, had said: '*You recall, comrades, how the wealth of the oil companies was acquired in Mexico . . . How many wretched Indians in Vera Cruz, in Tamaulipas, in Tabasco, and in other parts of the country were sacrificed! They employed company police and, during the fateful days of Revolution, even had a whole army at their service. Like the condottieri of Renaissance Italy, these traitors to their country were paid by the companies to protect their properties.*'

Statements of this kind were the fuel for most of the oratory which blazed in Mexico at the time of the expropriation. They were widely accepted in the country and even outside it where so much public opinion is formed by the reading of headlines. Well-intentioned citizens of the U.S.A. and England, who had no special interest in the question, became vaguely aware that 'there was a lot to be said on both sides; the oil companies did not behave at all well.' What is the truth?

The charges are never substantiated by detail against Mexican Eagle and the question is rather philosophic than historic; what ought the behaviour to be, of a large, wealthy corporation in a small and poor State? The oil companies came to Mexico when it was a wealthy and stable country; the revolutionaries brought it to ruin; one by one they obliterated its former sources of wealth except petroleum, which the companies managed to keep going (though from 1921 for ten years with a very heavy decline) until they occupied a position of disproportional importance. It was admittedly an embarrassing position for the republican government to find themselves the sovereigns of a vastly richer subject; as we shall see the solution which commended itself to them was to ruin that industry too and reduce the whole country to uniform squalor. Was it improper for the Companies to resist this solution ?

It is manifestly unreasonable for General Cardenas to plead, as he did in his Note to the British Government, that the Mexican Eagle was an exclusively Mexican concern answerable only to local law, and at the same time deny them the right to take any interest in the processes by which the law was made. The General, too, is, like all revolutionary leaders, in a somewhat ambiguous position with regard to revolutions. The crown of Spain might logically claim that all rebellion was of its nature, wrong ; no subsequent government of independent Mexico has that right. 'Traitor' has come to mean one who did not support the last successful act of revolution. General Cardenas's personal vanity enables him to take the logical hurdles without a spill. All governments before the splendid day in 1935 when, with clemency unprecedented in Mexican politics, he gave his former boss, General Calles, twelve hours to leave the country alive, have been unjust and their personnel traitors (he would probably make an exception of Juarez and Madero ; for the latter, sentiment is still strong ; he and General Cardenas would have found few points of agreement). Thus a corporation which has attempted to work harmoniously with his predecessors is damned as an ally of the Enemies of the People.

'Working harmoniously' with any Mexican institution involves a good deal that might be regarded askance in Europe. On occasions no doubt the oil companies, faced with the alternatives of curtailing their work or of paying the customary, irregular levies of the political bosses, conformed to local usage; there are few concerns in Mexico, native or foreign, private or public, which are innocent of this. The majority of the courts and the government officials are venal; that is they expect and are expected to supplement their meagre salaries as best they can. A bought decision is not necessarily an unjust one. The government inspectors whose duty it is to examine machinery and see that the prescribed safety devices are employed, expect large tips not to certify defective factories but to approve efficient ones; if the tip is not paid they refuse their certificate and the company is fined; if the company appeals, they may be left unheard or a higher official may be sent who will expect a correspondingly higher bribe. A wealthy institution like the oil companies naturally becomes the target for a continuous fusillade of malicious and irresponsible litigation. They soon learned to their cost that a clear case did not guarantee a favourable decision. It is cheaper and quicker to conform to the custom of the country however reprehensible it seems.

In the matter of political interference the truth, as far, at any rate, as Mexican Eagle is concerned, seems to be the exact reverse of the popular belief. If the company is censurable with regard to its political behaviour it is that it did too little, not too much. They were in Mexico for the purpose of producing oil and they stuck to their posts resolutely through all the giddy changes of local politics. When the American drillers fled, the British stayed on, continued to drill, store, prospect, though rival armies were manœuvring all round them. They paid their taxes to whomever was in a *de facto* position to demand them. When the whole country was given up to guerilla bands, looting, burning and massacring, they armed their men to defend their own lives and homes and the company's property. When the Federal Government had ceased to function and a revolutionary general was in a position to demand blackmail, they sometimes paid it ; that is what General Cardenas means when he talks of their financing rebellion. The Mexican Eagle staff stayed at their work in conditions of imminent danger and concentrated on their work. In the light of recent events it is easy to say that they should have done more ; that they owed obligations to the country where they worked and should have defended more than their own possessions ; that they were too tolerant of the succession of scoundrels who emerged from anarchy into brief periods of power. When all the decent elements in the country were united against Calles they did nothing and allowed the successful revolt, when it came, to be the work of Cardenas and Toledano. That is, I think, an arguable indictment ; but, as many American ambassadors have learned to their cost, it is difficult to meddle profitably in Mexican affairs, very easy to deplore events that take place there, very difficult to foresee them. The companies' moderation may yet be rewarded and the extreme folly of Cardenas and Toledano may turn to their benefit.

Ironically enough, at the early stages of the conflict, one of the charges was that the oil companies were anti-democratic in sentiment and sold their oil to the fascist powers. Nothing has been said about this lately, since the Mexican Government has found little enthusiasm for the confiscated oil in law-loving countries and has been obliged to deal mainly with the fascist states.

The further charge, that the oil companies failed to promote culture among their workmen, is not, I think, seriously made by anyone in Mexico and is intended solely for foreign consumption. What, I wonder, did Mr. Morineau expect the companies to do? They paid high wages and the men spent them in Mexican fashion, on loutish enjoyments. 'Saloons and houses of prostitution flourished'; what does Mr. Morineau expect the companies to do about that? When, in time of manifest peril, the companies organized protective guards, Mexican patriots pretended to be outraged; what would they say if the companies had formed vigilance committees and patrolled their workers' homes with squads of women police? That, indeed, would be an intolerable imposition; the workman may well talk of slavery when his employer claims the right to supervise his leisure and direct how his wages are to be spent. The companies did much to secure healthy conditions for their men, and were deliberately prevented from doing more, but this point belongs to the further question of whether the men's claims were *bona fide* grievances. The complaints quoted from Mr. Morineau and General Cardenas mean nothing less than that the companies did not usurp the proper functions of local government. They paid high wages and high taxes; the workmen misspent the wages and the politicians misspent the taxes, with the result that the country did not benefit as richly as it might have done had it been differently inhabited. That is hardly the companies' fault ; but supposing that they had adopted a different policy and supposing, as would obviously not have happened in fact, the local authorities had allowed them to make their properties in a state within the state, a model settlement standing in perpetual reproach to the ramshackle and savage lands surrounding them. Supposing they had taken their workers in hand from birth to death, had them born in a company's hospital, educated in company's schools, entertained in the company's playing fields and theatres, edified in the company's library, pensioned off in the company's alms houses and burned up in the company's crematorium ; if they became company's men instead of Cardenas's. There indeed would be an imperialism to enrage a patriotic Mexican ; a development that could only end in the political separation of the oil fields from the rest of the country.

One can imagine the charabanc loads of proud tourists driving out to the companies' domains . . . " And here, folks, we turn our backs on the dark ages and come into the light of the 20th century progress. You are now leaving Mexico and entering Petroland. The queue outside the gates are Mexicans applying for Petroland citizenship ; since the Toledano-Cardenas war applications for citizenship have greatly exceeded the quota ; but temporary working permits are being issued to refugees who satisfy the medical requirements. The blockhouse on the right is the headquarters of the Petroland gendarmerie. On the left you see the Doheny shrine. This beautiful marble statue was erected at the cost of over a million American dollars by admirers in Tea Pot Dome. On the right is the

Ambassador Wilson memorial . . . note the native woman laying flowers at the feet of Mr. Doheny. I am glad to tell you that in Petroland this cult is rapidly replacing the retrograde devotion to saints and crosses which we have noted up country . . . the Company's post-office is here. You may buy Petroland stamps in all denominations. No doubt some of you would like to send a postcard of the late Sir Henri Deterding back home and afterwards, if you step round to the Hail and Farewell Bureau you will each be given an ornamental bottle of crude oil to take away as a souvenir . . ."

5

But the companies did not create, nor could they without the help of international intervention have created, a Petroland. They remained instead a part of the Mexican Republic, subject to its laws and sharing its diverse fortunes. They left it to the Government to produce its own plans for national salvation, and the plans, when ready, were found to follow the old Mexican precedent that has proved disastrous again and again but remains ineradicable in Mexican statesmanship, of progress through theft.

The simple principle, that a nation becomes rich through the industry, thrift and enterprise of its people and through nothing else, so well accepted elsewhere in the world that it is trite to mention it, remains a paradox to the Mexican politician. For him wealth is, in fact and in theory, the product of theft ; when in the early days of the Republic the politicians had reduced the state to bankruptcy, they looked round for something to rob ; the Church was physically defenceless so they set themselves to obliterate the single common bond which united the heterogeneous population ; the single institution which transcended provincial limitations and which, however imperfect in state, provided an acceptable and universally accepted machinery for infusing international culture ; the full implications of the destruction of the Church in Mexico will be discussed in another chapter ; here the significant fact is that the robbery was a complete failure in its ostensible object ; the sums produced were completely disproportionate to the damage done, and quickly disappeared into private pockets, leaving the State in as distressed a condition as it had been before.

In the present generation when the Government set about the laudable work of establishing a population of peasant proprietors on the land, the same predilection was evident. The country is very sparsely populated and though much of it would require very large clearance, irrigation, drainage and fertilization works of the kind so successfully introduced into Italy, to bring it into cultivation, there were tracts of country lying empty which required only the plough and rudimentary attention to make fertile. A land scheme based on increasing the cultivated area would have had the support of every reasonable person, there and abroad. That however was not the Mexican politicians' habit. Instead they adopted the easier course of revenging themselves on their political opponents by seizing the estates that were already in profitable occupation. Certain provision was made in the law for the protection of special crops

—sisal, coffee, sugar, etc.—but they were disregarded in practice. The confiscations were carried through, and are still being completed, with the usual accompaniments of graft and jobbery ; the white aristocracy Mexican and foreign alike was ruined ; that was the only success achieved ; production fell everywhere ; the country was increasingly unable to feed the towns, and in the areas where the government had taken a direct share in the enterprise, lending money for seeds and tools, they were faced with a huge deficit which showed no promise of improvement. To the Mexican political mind this admitted of only one solution ; a new steal. The plunderable assets were rapidly decreasing ; bank accounts were being transferred abroad ; the mining industry was, for the most part, working on a suicidal policy of getting all they could while there was anything to get ; working only easy seams, cutting down on expansion, failing to renew plant ; the railways had mostly been taken over already and were already bankrupt ; those which still worked under their former management had ceased for some years to show any profit. One industry alone seemed to offer a substantial temptation—oil.

The steps by which the theft was made, are common knowledge.

Two things were necessary ; a change in the law so that the act might be legal, and a campaign of agitation so that it might be popular. General Cardenas personally undertook the first task ; the second was entrusted to the very able hands of Lombardo Toledano and the C.T.M. bosses.

One of General Cardenas's first acts when he was put into the presidency was to employ the powers recently conferred on him to rid the Supreme Court of judges likely to be unsympathetic and replace them with his own nominees who, under the new Act, held office only during his own term ; to these judges and their subordinates—most especially to the arbitrators who sat in the Court of Conciliation to hear industrial disputes between employers and workers—he dictated as a matter of public policy what had for some time, under fear of the C.R.O.M. and its more violent successor, the C.T.M., been their practice : that judicial favour was the exclusive possession of the manual labourer. 'The modern conception of the functions of the State,' he said, 'requires that doubtful cases be decided in favour of the weaker party. To mete out equal treatment to two parties that are not equal is neither to administer justice nor to act equitably.' Henceforward no complaint of employed against employer was too preposterous for sympathetic hearing and, almost invariably, for success. In a speech at Monterey he suggested the principle that ability to pay was the sole criterion in fixing wages and in a sinister phrase invited the employers who were 'weary of the social struggle' to surrender their businesses. He left it to Toledano and his law courts to provoke the weariness.

Until 1936 the powers of the governing party over private property had not, in theory, been totalitarian. The 'Constitution' of 1917 provided that : 'Private property should not be expropriated except for reasons of public utility and by means of indemnification.' In November 1936 General Cardenas sent to Congress for ratification a new Law which annulled this provision by defining ' public utility ' in terms so wide and vague that they could cover any presidential caprice. The Mexican Bar Association protested against the Bill as unconstitutional, but it passed inevitably into Law. From that moment the President's power over every piece of property in the country was absolute.

Meanwhile the C.T.M. had been organizing a campaign of agitation among the oil workers. The hold which this organization had over the workers was complete ; the companies had after a struggle accepted the ' closed shop ' principle ; the local syndicate bosses now held the right of deciding who should be employed and who promoted, and exercised it with all the intimidation and extortion to which the country was accustomed. A man who voted against the wishes of the C.T.M. boss lost his syndicate membership and with it his livelihood. Since the syndicate funds depended on subscriptions, it was the C.T.M. policy to swell its membership by the inclusion of casual labourers who had no interest in the welfare of the industry. These considerations were no doubt effective in some degree in securing local support to Toledano's policy ; no doubt there were many workers in the oil fields who found themselves obliged to vote against their convictions, who were content under the companies' rule and distrusted the voluble officials from Mexico City, but to explain the whole movement in these terms, as many of the oil companies' executives are disposed to do, is to disregard a decade of growing animosity and a climax of spontaneous, if brief, exultation. There is an unanswerable case that the indignation was irrational, but it was none the less genuine and its explanation is independent of local considerations. Man is by nature an exile, haunted, even at the height of his prosperity, by nostalgia for Eden ; individually and collectively he is always in search of an oppressor who will take responsibility for his ills. The Treaty of Versailles, Sanctions, Jews, Bolshevists, Bankers, the Colour Bar—anything will do so long as he can focus on it his sense of grievance and convince himself that his own inadequacy is due to some exterior cause. It requires neither great oratory nor astute conspiracy to inflame a group with a sense of persecution ; a hint is enough ; and once a grievance is aroused there is no place for figures and arguments.

The workers in the oil industry were, both in actual wages and benefits, the most highly privileged in the country. The lowest unskilled labourer who, elsewhere, had an average daily wage of 1·13 pesos, was getting from 3 to 3·50 in the oil fields ; masons earned from 5·20 to 8·40, elsewhere they averaged 1·89 ; electricians had 6 to 7·60, against 2·74 ; carpenters 4 to 8·40 against 2·05, etc. These figures are taken from the *Annual Review* of the Mexican Department of Labour for 1935. At the time of the expropriation the figures for the oil industry were, in most cases, 10% or 15% higher. In addition to these wages the men received housing or a housing allowance, schools and dispensaries. The companies had made frequent offers to increase their social services, but a spirit of antagonism had arisen in the men, so that they were met with constant obstruction. The abuses of the medical benefit, for example, made them despair of any sane co-operation. The syndicates claimed and exercised the right to appoint the medical officers, who in most districts became agents for robbery. A man had merely to present himself at the dispensary to claim exemption from work, sick pay, and, most important, prescriptions for expensive patent medicines which he discounted for cash at the drug stores. Large numbers of peons were still living in temporary and wholly unsuitable huts ; pictures of these were circulated as propaganda at the time of the expropriation ; what was not shown was the great store of building materials which had been lying near them for two years, which the syndicate had forbidden the company to erect, not because they proposed to do so with non-union labour but because they were not employing the particular contractor from whom the syndicate boss had arranged a commission and whose tender had been the most expensive submitted. Vexatious litigation in which the company was invariably the victim, further embittered relations. Now that the oil had been found, and until the present wells were exhausted, conditions were favourable to production. The companies could afford to pay more and still show a reasonable profit provided they were allowed to control their business ; at the end of the negotiations they offered concessions which would cost them 25,000,000 pesos a year, conditionally upon the re-establishment of the normal working conditions without which a business of any kind anywhere in the world, must fail. This was refused and even used as a demonstration that the protestation of inability to pay had been made in bad faith. Nowhere in Mexico was there any illusion that the oil workers merited compassion ; that was an emotion kept for export so that the foreign governments involved might be embarrassed by sympathizers of their own nationality. No one in the Mexican government intended that the oil workers should gain anything by expropriation—nor indeed have they. When, however, at the beginning of the strike the companies made the suggestion that any additional charge on the companies should be distributed by way of an excess profits tax, not among the small and already privileged class of oil workers, but among the community as a whole, it was disregarded, for this was precisely what General Cardenas intended to do, while to have admitted it would have been to stultify the whole Toledano campaign of agitation in the oil fields. Throughout the entire controversy there are always these two separate forces: General Cardenas, resolved to avert the disaster which his agricultural policy had provoked, by confiscating the oil properties, and consequently giving complete liberty of action to Toledano to create a state of chaos in the industry. Toledano's policy culminated in the preposterous demands of the strikers in November 1936.

The version of these demands published in English by the Workers' University of Mexico and distributed free to visitors at the Six Year Plan Exhibition, requires considerable correction in matters of fact. The demand was for a new collective contract applicable to the whole industry annulling the various existing contracts by which the workers had willingly bound themselves at various recent dates. As itemized in this pamphlet the principal points of the new contract were:

(1) "*Reduction of the 'confidential employees'*," i.e. administrative, executive and advisory posts not appointed by the syndicate, from 900, a number

which had been found barely adequate, "*to 114. All other employees to be appointed and controlled by the Syndicate.*" The Workers' University pamphlet omits to add that 50% of the legal advisors were to be syndicate nominees.

(2) "*In cases of lays-offs, an indemnity to each worker of 90 days' wages, plus 25 days' wages for each year that he had been in the company's service.*"

(3) "*Workers voluntarily leaving employment after ten years to be paid 25 days' wages for each year. Should his leaving be caused by an abrogation of the labour contract through the employer's fault, an additional indemnity of 90 days' wages.*" With regard to this latter provision it is worth noting that in the existing state of the industrial courts it will be almost certain that a case would go against the employer, i.e. after ten years' work a man could give up his job and receive a bonus of a year's wages plus (see below) a life pension of 60% of his former earnings.

(4) "*The establishment of the 40 hour week*"; with pay for 56 hours.

(5) "*Medical service on a disease-prevention basis to be furnished at the cost of the employer with the necessary facilities for diagnosis, adequate medical installation, and the elimination of all humiliating red tape.*"

This is the kind of provision which sounds benevolent and unexceptionable but which, to anyone familiar with local conditions, would be intolerable. The doctors were to be syndicate nominees—a fact omitted from the pamphlet—and to serve the workers' dependants as well as themselves. The interpretation which might be put on 'disease-prevention basis' and the 'elimination of all humiliating red tape' might include almost any uncontrolled expenditure. It would in fact commit the companies to the provision of any amenities which the syndicate might think desirable.

(6) "*In cases of death from non-occupational causes, the payment of 60 days' wages, funeral expenses, plus 25 days' wages for each year of service.*"

(7) "*In cases of death from occupational causes, 1,400 days' wages.*"

(8) "*In cases of total and permanent disability from occupational causes, 1,825 days' wages, plus 25 days' wages for every year of service. If the injured worker has been employed for more than ten years, a pension.*" (Unspecified amount.)

(9) "*A pension system varying between full wages after 30 years' service and 60% wages after ten years' employment.*"

(10) "*Eighteen compulsory rest days a year,*" in addition to Sundays, all with full pay.

(11) "*Vacations: for workers of five years' service, 25 days a year; from five to ten years, 40 days; from ten to fifteen years, 50 days; from fifteen years up, 60 days.*" On full pay.

(12) "*The establishment of a Savings Fund, 10% discount from wages, 15% of wages contributed by employer.*"

(13) "*The founding of 45 scholarships for workers or their children.*"

(14) "*An opportunity for Mexican workmen to acquire the experience necessary to replace foreign technicians*" and all foreign technicians to be replaced by Mexicans within one year.

(15) "*Sanitary and comfortable housing for all workers or 2 pesos a day allowance.*"

(16) "*Wage increases*" totalling 28,149,560 pesos.

The Workers' University omit from this list various provisions tightening the hold of the syndicate on the workers and making it impossible for the company to discharge men for anything except criminal offences and a further privilege of three days' leave of absence on full pay at the worker's demand whenever, and, apparently, as often as he chose.

There was some dispute as to the total cost of these demands. The C.T.M. estimated the increase at 65,474,840 pesos annually; the companies' actuaries at £16½ million. It is impossible to estimate the losses in business efficiency. No one, whatever his political views, can suppose that Toledano intended these demands to be acceptable, or that General Cardenas believed that the nation would benefit by the creation of a class, twenty-five thousand strong in a nation of sixteen millions, enjoying wages out of all proportion to the standard of living in the country, and privileges unknown to any trade or profession in any country in the world. In the controversy that followed the expropriation no serious attempt was made to defend Toledano's demands, nor was any attempt made to put them into effect by the new managers. By then the issue had changed and the appeal was for sacrifice rather than improvement, patriotism rather than privilege. But at the time of the threatened strike, in the winter of 1936 and the spring of 1937, it does seem that the men had been persuaded that the paradisal conditions proposed were in fact realizable, and it was on the basis of these demands that the case was heard by the Court of Conciliation.

The real decision had already been made and the steps taken to legalize it are of purely academic interest. The history of the succeeding months merely demonstrates that the Mexican Government had already dismissed the ideal of a peaceful settlement. The demands were first itemized on November 3rd, 1936, with the intimation that they must be not only discussed but approved by a date finally extended to November 29th at 11 a.m. The draft had taken many months to compile, covered 165 pages of legal script, contained 250 clauses, and 40 pages of figures dealing with the wage-schedule. The companies expressed their willingness to negotiate but pointed out the impossibility of digesting proposals so elaborate and revolutionary within the time limit. Public opinion, neither at home nor abroad, was sympathetic to the syndicate's peremptory tactics and General Cardenas proposed a six months' extension for discussion. The companies pointed out that similar contracts in the past had taken as long as two years to negotiate and never less than eight months. The Labour Delegation insisted on a period of 120 working days and were upheld. The assembly sat almost daily from the beginning of December until the end of May 1937, under the chairmanship of the Head of the Labour Department. The policy of the Labour Delegation was consistently obstructionist ; in particular by its contention that the new contract should not be legally binding on the industry as prescribed by the Law of November 27th, but a temporary 'special form of general collective contract' liable to further expansion and providing no guarantee of settled working conditions, by its attempt to coerce the Maritime Workers' Unions into the Petroleum Syndicate, and by an attempt to exclude all lawyers from the Employers' Delegation which they pressed to the point of absenting themselves from the assembly for some days. By the end of March it was clear that the discussion of the clauses seriatim could not possibly end within the prescribed limits. Accordingly there was a recess, at the end of which the Employers produced a counter-proposal, expressly omitting the wage-schedule which in its nature required longer consideration. These proposals were submitted on April 12th. Within twenty-four hours—a time hardly sufficient for their perusal, still less for their study—the proposals were rejected and the strike called for midnight on May 27th. Public opinion, however, was still unprepared for drastic action. The strike was called off in ten days and a year of hopeless, acrimonious discussion followed before General Cardenas felt himself strong enough to decree the expropriation.

The form the campaign now took was an ' economic suit ' and the investigations of a commission appointed by the Labour Board into the question of the companies' ability to pay. The Commission, as things turned out, consisted of one man, a local communist professor whose activities form one of the few humorous features of a drab episode. In order to establish the average profits of the industry he confined his enquiry to the years 1934–36, serenely neglecting the previous depression ; for these three years he preferred his own purely fanciful assessment of profits averaging £3,100,000 to the figure of £1,200,000 proved in the companies' books, and on the basis of these figures made his recommendations for increases in wages and benefits. So mixed did he get in his arithmetic even then that he calculated the cost of his proposals at £1,400,000 a year, when, in fact, as was abundantly demonstrated, they would have cost £2,300,000, i.e. almost double the actual average profits. He further reaffirmed the administrative demands originally made by the syndicate.

The Labour Board confirmed the professor's findings and the companies appealed to the Supreme Court. Their case, a formidable compilation of 7000 pages in length, was presented on February 2nd, 1938. Despite the fact that their deliberations were disturbed by popular demonstrations, the judges were able to weigh the evidence with despatch and at the end of the month announced their decision against the appeal. The companies made a final offer to increase wages and benefits by £1,400,000—the sum which the professor thought his proposals would cost—provided the administration of the business was not interfered with. General Cardenas refused to discuss the offer or to communicate it to the workers. Their part in the affair was over. They had been useful, with their imagined grievances, in bringing about the crisis ; from now on they must get back to work and forget their aspirations ; forget, too, the tangible benefits which they had won for themselves in the past. It was not to enrich *them* that there had been all the bustle in Mexico City. A few of the bosses, it is true, profited for the time. A Mr. Juan Gray, the manager in Mexico City of the Petroleum syndicate, increased his salary from 590 pesos a month to 5,300 ; Mr. Viesca Arispe, manager at Tampico, from 600 to 2,800 ; Mr. Rubio, comptroller at Tampico, from 500 to 2,000 ; the wages of a Mr. Azorar rose suddenly from 7·70 a day as chauffeur, to 1,300 a month as manager.

For a dozen or so of the most active politicals, expropriation brought apocalyptic rewards. In the oil fields, however, thousands have been thrown out of work and the sole gain was that some of the houses, bought years before by the companies and boycotted by the syndicate, were hastily fitted together to greet the delegates of the International Labour Congress on their tour of inspection and approval.

6

The expropriations, once decreed, were carried out speedily and effectively ; property of all kinds was taken without being inventoried, safes were forced and documents, title deeds and cash carried off. In practice, as in theory, the whole process conformed to the new, Nazi statecraft.

Every feature of the Cardenas regime—except the catch-phrases—is an echo of Central Europe. Government is by a semi-military executive which overrides judicature and legislature ; popular consent is achieved by agitation ; education is a department of propaganda, religion banned from the schools and its place taken by nationalism and national grievances ; the basic assumption of foreign policy is that the democracies will not fight ; force may be used to steal what force will not defend. There is the same chain of cause and consequence ; the Government tells the people that they are miserable and that the cure of their ills is violent breach of international order ; when the beneficial effects do not follow, the breach is held up to admiration as a positive achievement—an end in itself—which must be defended by further sacrifice. That has been the result in Mexico. The expropriations were first proposed as a means of raising social conditions ; they are now an excuse for depressing them. Finances are desperate. General Cardenas has found that the law-abiding will not buy his petrol and the outlaws cannot pay for it. The temptation to join the Barter Group would be overwhelming were it not for the question of indemnity. General Cardenas has repeatedly offered to pay compensation for the expropriated properties. Since the fall of Porfirio Diaz, Mexico has been a consistent defaulter on her public debts, which amount to about ten times her total annual revenue ; she has paid neither the principal nor the interest on her earlier expropriations of agricultural properties. By taking the oil properties she was adding a sum to her capital liabilities which she could not conceivably pay, but until she has actually defaulted it is difficult for the State Department at Washington to accuse her of a breach of international law. Accordingly, in the face of all facts, she maintains her readiness to pay. Suggestions that she should pay for her theft by returning a percentage of the stolen property are too naïve to be considered seriously anywhere except in the Mexican press. In March 1938, General Cardenas attempted to cash in on the popular enthusiasm by raising a loan of £5,000,000. These bonds were to bear no interest for ten years but to remain in the subscriber's possession as 'diplomas of patriotism'. Prodigious attempts were made to stimulate generosity. Government agents distributed live stock to the peasants in the vicinity of the capital and what had not been devoured overnight was returned next morning at the Opera House to the accompaniment of military music and news-cameras. About £20,000 was raised. In July the loan was closed and the fund diverted to pay the troops.

The situation at the time of writing is a deadlock, the issue of which must depend on the degree of pressure which the United States can bring. There is a market for bootleg petrol in Japan, Germany and Italy ; an exclusive barter agreement on the Central European model might save General Cardenas's finances, but he wants money not material and within his country he has to reckon with the Marxism he has fostered in every department of national life ; it would be difficult for Toledano to accept the Nazification of the country ; can Cardenas now dispense with him ? And, further, would the ' Good Neighbour ' policy bear the strain of the transformation ?

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GOOD NEIGHBOUR

I

AS has been noted before, the attitude of the ordinary citizen of the United States towards the Mexican has many points of resemblance with that of the nineteenth century Englishman's towards Ireland. He regards him as disorderly, improvident and superstitious, and behind this condemnation there lurks an undefined feeling of guilt. The history of the two countries consists of a series of misunderstandings and miscalculations, of injudicious interference repeatedly prosecuted up to the point beyond which it might have proved beneficial and then capriciously abandoned, of alternations of arrogance and sentimentality, rapacity and benevolence, domination and neglect, of a kind which forms a close parallel with the English policy in Ireland during the centuries between the Reformation and the Peace Treaty, and the consequent ills have been aggravated rather than mollified by the fact that, throughout, Mexican independence has been sedulously affirmed.

It is difficult for modern Europeans, still more for Americans who tend, by nature, to take a short view of history, to realize that the predominance of the U.S. in the New World is quite a recent development. The inhabitants of Mexico before the conquest lived on an immensely higher plane of civilization than the aboriginals of the North ; in the colonial period the Spanish possessions were pre-eminent in extent, wealth and culture. It was only after her severance from Spain that the decay of Mexico, threatened before by certain inherent but not ineradicable weaknesses, was consummated by the factional and revolutionary troubles that are still daily debasing her. The splendour of Spanish colonial architecture still stands to remind tourists of this superiority but there are other, less accessible, facts which are sometimes overlooked. By 1575, a century before the first press was set up in British America, books were being printed in Mexico City, not only in Spanish, but in twelve different Indian languages. There were three universities in Spanish America nearly a century before the foundation of Harvard. There was a Medical School at the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico two hundred years before Harvard's, and anatomy and surgery were taught with dissection eighty-six years before William Hunter opened the first school of dissection in England. Elementary education for Indian children existed wherever there was a mission station ; inevitably, in three hundred years, some of the schools languished while others flourished, but the campaign for their extension only ended with the revolution.

At the village schools the peasants were taught not only their religion, but reading, writing, music, handicrafts of all kinds and agriculture. In many centres there were institutions of higher education for the Indians, some of whom even took up teaching posts in Europe. As early as 1541 a disgruntled colonist, Geronimo Lopez, himself no great scholar, was complaining bitterly to the King that there were Indians who spoke Latin ' like another Cicero, and every day the number grows.' Von Humboldt, in 1803, made these observations : ' No city in the new continent, without even excepting those of the United States can display such great and solid scientific establishments as the capital of Mexico ' ; ' The capital and several other cities have scientific establishments which will bear a comparison with those of Europe '. ' Instruction is communicated gratis in the Academy of Fine Arts. It is not confined alone to the drawing of landscapes and figures . . . the Academy labours successfully to introduce among the artisans a taste for elegance and beautiful forms . . . every evening some hundreds of young people draw from reliefs or living models, while others copy drawings of furniture, chandeliers or other ornaments in bronze. In this assemblage rank, colour and race is confounded.' ' No European government has sacrificed greater sums to advance the knowledge of the vegetable kingdom than the Spanish government ' (of Mexico). '. . . All these researches, conducted during twenty years in the most fertile districts of the new continent, have not only enriched science with more than four thousand new species of plants, but have also contributed much to diffuse a taste for natural history among the inhabitants of the country.' ' The best mineralogical work in the Spanish language was printed in Mexico, the *Manual of Oryctognosy* by M. del Rio . . . the first Spanish translation of Lavater's *Elements of Chemistry* was also published in Mexico.' While the Puritan settlers in the North were denying all education to their women, nuns had established elementary girls' schools all over Mexico and, in the cities, substantial colleges.

There were, of course, abuses and distortions; Francis Clement Kelly[1] must be read in conjunction with Ernest Gruening[2]; unsuitable men sometimes got themselves appointed to important posts in Church and State; charitable institutions sometimes failed to preserve the energy of their founders; racial and class distinctions often hampered the working of good laws; order was precariously maintained in districts remote from the centres of government; acute poverty existed side by side with splendid wealth; but the records up to the last decade of Spanish rule, give evidence that the normal processes of renewal and expansion were continuously at work and that Mexican civilization was alive and, in many ways, vigorous.

There was little intercourse with the English colonies, for it was the policy of the Kings of Spain to monopolize all trade and much of the antagonism of the sixteenth century still survived in the New World. The Mexicans despised their neighbours as barbarians and had not yet learned to fear them; thus the Chinese regarded the Japanese in the days of the Manchu Empire. When the English colonists declared their independence the differences between the two races widened; Mexico, now, represented not only the historic dangers of the Armada and the Inquisition, but the more present and obnoxious enemy—European imperialism. From the first the United States were keen proselytizers for republican and puritanical institutions and the natural enemies of the monarchical, feudal, hierarchic, baroque culture of Mexico. Accordingly they sought, encouraged and misinterpreted the elements of revolution.

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[1] *Blood-drenched Altars* by Francis Clement Kelly: in spite of the intolerable artiness of its illustrations, this book is the best statement of the clerical case.

[2] *Mexico and its Heritage* by Ernest Gruening: for most Americans and many English the standard defence of the revolution.

How far they misinterpreted them may be judged from the interview between President, then Secretary of State, Monroe and Colonel Bernardo Guttierez de Lara. This took place in 1811; Colonel de Lara was a revolutionary refugee who came to Washington to see what help might be forthcoming for his movement. Monroe received him amicably and said: The United States would aid the revolution in the Mexican provinces with all their power and would sustain it to the point, not only of furnishing arms and ammunition but in addition with 27,000 good troops which they would soon have for the purpose. But that Colonel Bernardo and the other revolutionary chiefs should arrange for the establishment of a good Constitution . . . He laid stress on that of the United States and gave him to understand that the American Government desired that the same Constitution be adopted in Mexico, and that they then would admit these republics into the Union and that with the addition of the other American provinces it would become the most formidable power in the world.

Colonel de Lara was a fugitive and a suitor. He listened with growing impatience until the Secretary of State raised the question of absorption into the Union, when he left in fury. In the light of subsequent history one may doubt whether his country would not have been the happier for Monroe's suggestion; in 1811, with Mexico still proud and prosperous, it came as an outrageous impertinence.

The Mexican revolution as a popular movement was speedily suppressed ; when it came, it was the work of the suppressors ; a military movement planned in the Masonic Lodges. Its original aim was to eliminate the cumbrous and dilatory machinery of the Vice-regal government and establish a monarchical and aristocratic regime under which locally born Spaniards might have a full share in the profits of office. The Empire of Iturbide had few features which Monroe could regard with sympathy ; it had many weaknesses which it became the policy of Washington to exploit. The first instrument of this policy was Joel Poinsett, who came to Mexico at the establishment of its independence, first as United States agent, later as accredited Minister ; the means he chose, perhaps the only efficacious means he could have chosen, was the establishment of a rival secret society—the Yorkist Rite to oppose the dominant Scottish Rite.

By its nature the full history of the secret societies of Mexico can never be known and in the general ignorance vast legends have naturally accumulated. It is certain that most of the disasters of the first generation of independent Mexicans, and it is probable that much of their successors', have been due to the organizations which adopted the vocabulary of European Freemasonry. So far as is known the Grand Lodges of the United States and England have consistently refused recognition to their Mexican brothers. The Scottish Rite, which seems to have no connexion with Scotland, appears to have been introduced into Mexico by the Spanish garrisons of the Napoleonic era who had themselves adopted it from revolutionary France. There is no need to accept sensational stories of a world organization dedicated to anarchy, to understand how the Lodges became the centres of intrigue ; at their meetings men of different positions, whose association elsewhere would attract comment, could meet in circumstances of absolute secrecy and freedom of discussion ; since the law of the Church forbade membership, it was natural that their tone should be exclusively agnostic and anti-clerical. The Scottish Rite, however, may have included renegade members of the clergy ; so far as it had any policy it seems to have favoured constitutional monarchy, to have been zealous of the privileges of rank and services and tolerant of religious practices for the uninitiated ; it concerned itself mainly with personalities and the distribution of public offices to its own members. The Yorkist Rite, introduced by Poinsett, was the natural rallying point for those who had been disappointed in the share-out of benefits ; it was made up of the lawless elements of the revolution—the Villas and Zapatas of the revolution of 1910—and was republican, proletarian and fiercely irreligious in character. Five lodges were organized with local chiefs. Poinsett's chief office was to coax from the Scottish Rite disgruntled members of more responsible position ; the most important of these recruits was Arizpe, the Minister of Justice, a political priest. His presence in the new Rite secured protection for its members before the Courts. The acquittal of a Colonel Ayestaran on a charge of peculation, advertised this privilege ; there was an immediate response from senators, generals, governors. Soon the two Rites were divided not only by political views but by personal vendettas. For fifty years the history of Mexico becomes a series of coups and plots, assassinations and executions ; of embezzlement and bribery ; the learned and charitable institutions were sacked to provide funds for the rival gangs ; the work of three centuries of civilized rule was obliterated in a generation, leaving the nation bankrupt, discredited abroad and divided by irreconcilable hatred at home. By this time doubts began to arise at Washington whether these turbulent neighbours would be a desirable addition to the United States.

The personalities of the various competitors for power during this anarchic period—Santa Anna Alvarez, Comonfort, Farias, Bustamante and the rest—are of purely local interest. Throughout their blood struggles the participation of the United States took two principal forms. There was what may be called the ideological campaign against the Spaniards and the Church, initiated by Poinsett, and there was the purely practical campaign for the acquisition of territory. Both were tolerably successful. The former culminated in the Spring of 1860 in armed intervention in favour of Juarez, when he was on the point of defeat, by the confiscation by the United States navy of two of Miramon's ships ; this action, and the conviction that it would be repeated if necessary, changed the future of the war and consummated the revolution. Juarez had signed a treaty offering territorial concessions as the price of help, but the United States Senate honourably refused to enforce it.

Less delicacy had been shown in the case of Texas and California. In 1820 the first United States citizen, a Moses Austin, had obtained permission to settle in Texas, then Mexican territory, on the grounds that he was a persecuted Catholic ; he died prematurely but his son Stephen carried out his intention, and in 1821 Mexico adopted the practice of granting charters to colonists from the North. As political conditions in Mexico deteriorated the position of these settlers became less enviable, but their numbers increased and they soon formed a vigorous minority somewhat analogous to the *uitlanders* among the Boers. In 1835 they had become self assertive enough to provoke government notice and Santa Anna abrogated the State Constitution. A revolution, led and supported from the United States, was savagely suppressed. A small force of American soldiers then captured Santa Anna and his whole army ; under danger of summary execution he acknowledged the independence of Texas and returned in a dilatory manner by way of the United States. General Houston became first president of Texas, which avowed nominal independence until 1844, when great bitterness was aroused in Mexico by its inevitable annexation. President Herrera issued a call for the defence of the country, and Santa Anna returned from one of his frequent periods of exile to lead a disastrous campaign against the invaders, who had, meanwhile, over-run California. The war was an unrelieved series of defeats for the Mexicans ; Mexico City was taken and the Peace of Guadalupe-Hidalgo signed on February 2nd, 1848, on the Americans' terms. By these terms Mexico lost more than half her territory. Compensation, of a kind, was given. The Americans could have taken more and paid nothing ; the surviving bitterness was in no way lessened by their moderation ; subsequent history would have been very different if, as was proposed at the time, the boundary had been drawn south of Tampico.

2

At the beginning of 1861 Juarez entered Mexico City ; he owed his position to support from the United States ; he was regarded with detestation by the conservative elements in the country ; the government was deeply in debt and without hope of legitimate increase of income. The Church had been despoiled by successive dictators, her plate melted down and her colleges closed ; Juarez exiled the Bishops and made a last, desperate attempt to sell off the Church's remaining assets. But few could afford, and still fewer were willing, to purchase property acquired in this way. In Mexico City houses belonging to various religious institutions, assessed at over half a million dollars, realized less than two thousand. In the provinces the sums obtained were further reduced by the peculations of the various officials through whose hands they passed. He succeeded in bringing about the final ruin of the Church without adding appreciably to the national wealth. There was no alternative but to suspend payment on his foreign debt. But for the time his friends in the North were occupied with their own affairs. The civil war in the United States seemed to offer the Mexican conservatives a chance to re-establish themselves without interference, but they were now so demoralized that the only means which seemed suitable was to invite further foreign intervention.

The episode of the Emperor Maximilian is an ideal subject for the cinema and has twice been used as such. In Mexican history it is nothing but an episode. It showed that the country had now deteriorated to a condition in which government could only be maintained by force and that national pride still ferociously preferred anarchy to foreign domination. Juarez still lived and the United States, though preoccupied, still supported him ; the Church treasured mediæval traditions of her responsibility, did not recognize a champion in Maximilian, with his sceptical nineteenth century German culture and his light love affairs, nor accept from him terms she had rejected from Juarez ; the patriots in the army resented the French garrisons. Only a man of superlative energy could have enforced his rule. It was agreeable to many, after the brigand-camps from which the country had been governed, to have a Court organized on the most stately European model, to have a Hapsburg in place of the half-breeds, to have an Emperor with a fashionable taste in house decoration and an interest in botany, to see at public functions a gracious figure, head and shoulders above the assembly. But Mexican popular heroes are drawn in another shape—squat, swarthy, passionate, intolerant, vain men who when cornered shoot their way to freedom and take to the mountains, who will steal and promise and give lavishly, sell anything and repudiate the bargain, murder their friends and buy off their enemies, nurse a grudge and forget a kindness, sometimes grossly sacrilegious, sometimes heroically pious, Aztec and Castillian inextricably confounded. It is a significant fact that the Mexican history books and the frescoed caricatures which are the most notable instruments of government propaganda deal gently with the Archduke Maximilian ; he was never at all dangerous ; he conformed to the Mexican ideal only in his dignified bearing before the firing squad. Miramon, one of the finest of the Mexican conservatives, was shot with him.

The United States regained their influence ; Juarez came back and reigned for five years, until his death, among sporadic but unsuccessful rebellions. His successor, Lerdo de Tejada, attempted to carry on Juarez's system in face of growing odium ; in 1876 civil war on a national scale broke out, Tejada fled to the United States, General Porfirio Diaz took Mexico City and retained uninterrupted control, even during the Gonzalez presidency (1880–1884), until 1911. For some time the United States refused recognition of Diaz's government. The American Civil War was over but the South was still in a dangerous state and a war of aggression was seriously suggested as a possible outlet for domestic bitterness. John W. Foster, the U.S. minister, President Hayes and a powerful group in Washington were strongly anti-Mexican. In Foster's *Diplomatic Memoirs*, writing of this time, he says ' Certain gentlemen especially interested in the administration of President Hayes had conceived the idea that in view of the tension in the public mind created by the partisans of Mr. Tilden and of the disturbed condition of affairs in the Southern States, it would divert attention from pending issues and tend greatly to consolidate the new administration, if a war could be brought on with Mexico and another slice of its territory added to the Union.'

War, however, would not have been popular in the U.S., and the very cause which rendered it desirable—the weakness of Hayes' popular support—rendered it impossible; General Diaz moreover was a man of vastly superior capacity to the military dictators who preceded and succeeded him. Washington was obliged to recognize him and was soon working with him in tolerable harmony. The chief cause of friction during his reign was a series of police incidents on the frontier; both sides of the line were remote from the law and Mexico became the natural goal of fugitive criminals. Between 1874 and 1882 American posses in pursuit of marauders crossed the frontier twenty-three times, each occasion being, technically, an invasion of national territory. Moreover Mexican citizens, then and later, enjoyed very little protection in American territory; there were lynchings, sometimes in atrocious circumstances, summary executions and fatal brawls for which no effective protests were made in Washington. It is fashionable now, in Mexico, to speak of the regime of Porfirio Diaz as a time when national interests were sacrificed to foreign and the government became a native police force charged with making it easy for foreign capitalists to get rich. In fact Diaz was all the time concerned with keeping, as best he could, the commercial balance of power in the country. It was natural that American interests should predominate but it was an essential part of his policy to set them off, as far as he could, with European and to keep them in their proper place, as commercial undertakings concerned merely in developing natural resources. The conduct of foreign nineteenth century capitalists and their supporting governments in China made it clear that there was no place in the history of his age, for an exclusive nationalism. He kept the peace and he preserved the integrity of the country; there were no more cessions of territory. For a long time the United States had openly coveted the isthmus of Tehuantepec; it was Diaz himself, with the help of British capital and skill, who developed it and made it, before the opening of the Panama Canal, the main route from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He had a practical, soldier's estimate of the importance of national pride; he did not want to harbour foreign criminals and was quite pleased that their own police should take the trouble of recapturing them; he did not think national honour required Palmerstonian defences of the kind of citizen who got himself into trouble in the Texas saloons. But he went further; one day the Texans roasted alive a Mexican rough named Rodriguez. The newspaper *El Debate* reported the incident indignantly and there was general ill-feeling in Mexico City; instead of protesting, however gently, to Washington, Diaz suppressed *El Debate*. In 1910 the American Ambassador objected to the anti-American tone of two other papers, the *Diario del Hogar* and the *El Pais*: both were suppressed. These actions added nothing to the popularity either of the United States or the President. Moreover in spite of these efforts to be agreeable in many sections of America Diaz was not admired; towards the end of his reign he seemed to be sacrificing Mexican interests without gaining a corresponding support in the United States. High-minded Americans began to condemn him on doctrinaire grounds. He had reduced democratic forms to an absurdity; in many districts his police were corrupt and cruel ; something barely distinguishable from slavery existed in Yucatan, the American public were tired of eulogies of the dictator and read with zeal the well substantiated denunciations of his tyranny. Thus began the disastrous epoch of American interference in Mexican affairs on humanitarian grounds.

Before Diaz the issue was perfectly simple. The Americans believed in their ' manifest destiny ' to rule the entire continent ; they were an immensely powerful and sporadically aggressive neighbour to be kept at bay by whatever means seemed possible ; from the beginning of this century the issues became infinitely involved ; generally speaking they may be summarized in President Wilson's phrase, ' I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men.' This ambition, equally obnoxious to the Mexicans, is pregnant with ambiguous implications.

'*I am going to teach*'; that is to say : the Mexicans are still in a state of tutelage ; it is the duty of the American government to instruct and discipline. '*I*', the party momentarily in power at Washington ; what if a different party, with the same coercive powers, shall aspire to teach a different lesson ?

' *To elect*'; the basic American assumption, in face of much foreign and democratic evidence to the contrary, that ' election ' is more than a convenient method of providing a government ; it is divinely ordained. Elections, even in countries of homogeneous race, widespread education, and a tradition of disinterested public service are a capricious guide ; in Latin America they have always been farcical. There are, in various parts of the world, various means of securing election ; the candidate may buy votes in the old English way of ready money down, in the new English way of promises to pay from the public funds when elected ; he may evict opponents from their cottages or shoot them up with machine-guns in the streets of Cicero ; the Mexicans, for the most part, prefer to leave the voting papers uncounted and draw from the lists made up at the party headquarters. To whom and in what terms was President Wilson proposing to teach this elusive art of election ?

'*Good men*' ; good for what ? To be a strong and independent nation with its own institutions developed from its own traditions and needs, or a political no-man's-land of conflicting foreign influences, with orderly habits, balanced public finances, or a republic on the United States model which one day will earn inclusion in the Union, or a political experimental farm where revolutionary ideas may be tried out with a view to importation into the United States. (Just as the United States earned the gratitude of the world by 'trying out' prohibition, so the Mexicans may be said to be trying out Marxism.) All these aims have variously been attributed to the 'good man' in Mexico and all have received support from Washington at one time or another.

3

I think it is an open point whether, in 1910, a patriotic Mexican—or, for that matter, a disinterested foreigner—should have been a supporter of Porfirio Diaz. It is characteristic of Mexican history that at almost any period one looks at there are abundant reasons for deploring the existing regime ; one turns the pages and realizes that one was wrong ; the cure was always worse than the ill. This consideration alone should make one sceptical of betterment by the overthrow of General Cardenas.

Politically the Diaz regime had the weakness of all autocracies, that are not based on royalty, the difficulty of succession. Socially there was every reason to complain that the peons had not shared at all in the general prosperity and that the Mexicans of the more fortunate classes had not a proportionate place of influence in their country's development. After the long period of peace it seemed reasonable to believe that the people had become accustomed to orderly conditions and would not again lapse into anarchy. The days of bankruptcy seemed over ; Mexico was now rich enough to contemplate a more equitable distribution of her property. Wealthier Mexicans had been educated in England, France and the United States —for the Mexican educational system never recovered from the Reforms—and had learned to respect representative institutions ; they could be trusted to work a parliamentary system in a public spirited manner. These were the assumptions of the Maderists ; they proved tragically false but they seemed reasonable enough at the time.

It is not the object of this chapter to recount the details of the decline and fall of Mexico, but to trace their connexions with the United States and explain the peculiar relations that in consequence subsist between the two peoples.

Francisco Madero had every reason to believe that his policy would be sympathetic to the greater part of the American people ; everything which he represented had long been a boasted feature of their own system. His rebellion was not a proletarian movement ; the peasants' revolt in Morelos, which had been growing against Diaz, coincided with his own but developed into a movement against him. The kind of state which Madero hoped to bring into existence was very much like those that existed across the border. He was the type of President Wilson's ' good man '. Yet of the numerous causes to which his failure was due, one of the chief was the open opposition of the American Ambassador, another Wilson, who had a different conception of the country's requirements.

The guilt of Ambassador Wilson has been itemized by Gruening and seems indisputable. He was appointed to Mexico in the last days of the Diaz regime ; he had no previous diplomatic career to qualify him for the post ; his brother was Senator John M. Wilson, Republican boss of the State of Washington. There is a curiously ambiguous phrase employed in American politics, the ' tie-up ' ; it may mean a family connexion, a personal friendship, or direct paid employment. Ambassador Wilson was ' tied up '—by means of John M. Wilson and Richard Ballinger, Taft's first secretary of the interior—with the Guggenheims whose American Smelting and Refining Company had great interests in Mexico which were in direct competition with the Maderos. It is impossible for a foreigner to judge how much importance can be attached to these political-commercial ' tie-ups '. What is certain is that from the moment of Wilson's arrival the American

Embassy became the headquarters of a group of American business men who had ambitions in the country. It seems possible that at first this group welcomed a change of government in the belief that a weak President might be more amenable to pressure. It soon became clear that Madero had neither the inclination nor the authority to help them. From then on Ambassador Wilson set himself to destroy the administration, embarrassing it directly by peremptory and sometimes unreasonable claims, and undermining its prestige abroad by the information he sent to Washington. It is doubtful whether Madero would have survived long, even if he had been given sympathetic treatment ; Ambassador Wilson's opposition made his fall a certainty. In the summer of 1911 he was forecasting Madero's failure. In January 1912 he described the country as ' seething with discontent ' and the ' area of actual and open rebellion against the Government ' as ' not inconsiderable '. In February of that year his reports persuaded the Government at Washington to mobilize the entire regular army of the United States along the border, and to reinforce it with the National Guard and a recruiting campaign. News of this manœuvre, spreading throughout Mexico, was interpreted as having only one meaning ; that public order had broken down and that the American Government believed Madero's regime was about to fall. Immediately, all over the country, politicians who had been suspending judgment declared for rebellion; bands of brigands became armies and a period of seven years civil war had begun.

On March 1, the Orozco rebellion broke out in Chihuaha ; next day, before he had had time to inform himself of the gravity of the situation, and while his colleagues were still waiting on events, Wilson urged American nationals to evacuate large areas of the country. On March 15 he was calling for arms to defend the American colony in Mexico City. Three days later he telegraphed for a small armoury—1000 rifles and 1,000,000 cartridges—for the use 'for patriotic motives' of two of his American friends. One of these was Mr. George Beck, who, among other activities, was a director of a company known as the 'Tampico News Company'; this company, it was found at the beginning of May, was engaged in running guns to Zapata, one of the most ferociously destructive of the rebel leaders. On August 22, he reported conditions in six states to be 'as bad as at any time during the two revolutions, if not worse' and Madero as 'incompetent to meet the situation'. On the same day, two hours later, he was protesting that the President, who, according to his own reports, was no longer in effective control, was evincing a 'growing anti-American spirit' and a 'preference for European markets' and was 'harassing and discriminating against American interests'. As disorder spread Ambassador Wilson pressed Madero for 'a comprehensive and categorical statement' as to the measures he proposed to protect American interests. At the height of its troubles the administration replied patiently and in detail to all Wilson's complaints, showing such a proportion of them to be unjustified that it is impossible to attribute them to anything but malice. On January 7th, 1913, Wilson opened the new year by describing the whole situation as 'gloomy, if not hopeless'. A week later he called for a warship. On February 9th began the period known as the ' tragic ten days '.

Up to this date, it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. Wilson had said the country was lapsing into anarchy ; it did lapse into anarchy ; it is arguable that he was more foresighted than his colleagues and that he was merely doing his duty in communicating his apprehensions to his Government ; that is arguable if not convincing. During the ' tragic ten days ' his conduct was grossly irregular.

The course of events is recent and familiar history. The rebellion in Mexico City was the work of a garrison of 800 men, three batteries of artillery and the palace guard. It was enough to suppress normal activity in the city but not enough to dominate it. Wilson wired that public opinion, ' both native and foreign ', was ' overwhelmingly ' against Madero ; he called for ' drastic instructions, perhaps of a menacing character ', which were not forthcoming. Instead Wilson persuaded his colleagues to ask for Madero's resignation. The President refused. The American Embassy now became, in the words of the Cuban Minister, Marquez Sterling, ' the centre of a true conspiracy '. The determining event of the ten days was the defection to the rebels of General Victoriano Huerta ; the day before this took place Wilson wired ' Huerta notifies me to expect some action that will remove Madero from power.' At noon next day he wired that the coup had taken place ; it had been planned for that time but actually took place an hour and a half later. The evidence that Wilson was a party to the plot is overwhelming.

That evening the meeting between the leader of the rebellious garrison, Felix Diaz, and General Huerta, former commander of the defence, took place in the American Embassy. Healths were drunk to the new regime. Someone bothered to ask, ' And what will be the fate of poor Madero ? '

' Oh they will put Senor Madero in a madhouse,' said Wilson. ' As for the other ' (Pino Suarez) ' if they kill him it will be no great loss . . . We must not meddle in the domestic affairs of Mexico.'

Gustavo Madero and Basso, the *Intendente* of the Palace, had already been murdered. It was clear to everyone in the city that Francisco Madero's life was in danger. Wilson concerned himself only with the recognition of the new government. But suspicions had already been aroused in Washington about the part their ambassador was playing. He was instructed to see that no harm came to Madero. ' . . . This Government earnestly hopes to hear that he has been dealt with in a manner consistent with peace and humanity. You may in your discretion make use of these ideas in your conversation with General Huerta.' Wilson, however, reassured them that there was ' no prospect of injury ' to either the deposed President or Vice-President ; he urged the recognition of the new government as constitutional, popular, and, in the unanimous opinion of all observers, the only means to avoid further bloodshed.

It is a gloomy coincidence that in the two blackest crimes of recent Mexican history—the murders of Madero and of Pro—there was in each case an American Ambassador at hand who, alone, could have averted it. In Mexico everyone knew that Madero was in danger. The Cuban Minister, Madero's father and his mother appealed directly to Wilson ; at last his wife overcame her resentment and came to him in person ; she has left an account of her interview, printed by Gruening, on whom most of the evidence quoted in this section is drawn. She went with her sister-in-law ; the two ladies were kept waiting while the Ambassador was summoned from the Palace where he was at that moment in conference with Huerta ; when he came his manner was ' brusque '.

Mme. Madero said, ' I want you to use your influence to protect the lives of my husband and of the other prisoners.'

' That is a responsibility I do not care to undertake, either for myself or my government.'

' Will you be good enough, then, to send this telegram to President Taft.' She produced the draft of a message which she had attempted unsuccessfully to send through the normal service.

Wilson said, ' It is not necessary to send this,' but on pressure, put it in his pocket saying, ' All right. I will send it.' He then, in her distress, proceeded to lecture Mme. Madero on the cause of her husband's downfall. . . . ' He never wanted to consult with me . . . he had peculiar ideas . . . the people were not satisfied . . . I knew all this was going to happen . . . it would not have been good policy to warn him . . .'

Mme. Madero pressed that, whatever his shortcomings, he should be allowed to leave the country. Wilson would promise no more than that his bodily safety would be seen to.

Two days later the prisoners were murdered in circumstances which left no doubt that the crime was premeditated and condoned. It is charitable to suppose that Wilson was not in Huerta's confidence in this matter, but however shocked he was by the tragedy, he concealed his emotion in the telegrams in which he announced it. 'I am disposed to accept the Government's version of the affair,' he said, 'and consider it a closed incident.'

4

On March 4 the Taft administration retired, Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, and the policy of the State Department at Washington experienced a radical change. Huerta was now in power—precariously and disgracefully, but with the possibility of redeeming himself and restoring order ; his prestige depended very largely on the assumption that he had the support of the United States. The only justification for the means he had taken to get power would be the use he made of it ; the only justification of the support which Washington, in the person of their Ambassador, had given him when he was a rebel, would be continued and vigorous support now that he was *de facto* President.

Huerta was the antithesis of Madero ; it was possible he might succeed where his predecessor had failed ; for generations, now, most Mexican Presidents had reached their position by violence ; the sort of problems—Villa and Zapata in particular—which confronted the new government needed ruthless solutions ; besides the treacherous guards there were many decent men in Huerta's party—Pedro Lascurain, for example. It was not inconceivable that a tolerable government might emerge. Ambassador Wilson exerted himself in every way to provide Huerta with a fair chance ; his dispatches minimized the opposition, misinterpreted the views of his colleagues, suppressed unsympathetic consular reports, and continually urged the State Department to give Huerta their recognition. It was useless. In July he was recalled and retired. President Wilson believed that Huerta had done wrong and should be punished for it, no matter who else suffered with him. The punishment has lasted many years now and no one has suffered more than the innocent.

During the civil wars which followed, American ' recognition ' became the label of the *de jure* government ; these usually became *de facto* because recognition meant the exclusive right to buy arms. One of President Wilson's first acts was to reply to the message of congratulation from Huerta with a simple acknowledgment addressed to him as 'General'. This was on March 9th. In August, after Ambassador Wilson's recall, the President in his message to Congress said, ' It is now our duty to show what true neutrality will do to enable the people of Mexico to set their affairs in order. We cannot be the partisan of either party . . .'

' Either party ' was an unduly simple statement of the situation. There was in fact one party, then in power, Huerta's, which still commanded the adherence of those who preferred stability to revenge or loot and there was ranged against it a multitude of heterogeneous rebels. For a time an attempt was made to give them a semblance of unity by naming them collectively ' Constitutionals ' but they had nothing in common except the desire to overthrow the government and were soon at war among themselves. All the leaders of this period—Villa, Zapata, Carranza, Alvarado, Cedillo, Obregon—with the single exception of Calles who lives in affluent exile in the United States, have died violently, all at different times and in different circumstances. Villa, sniped one day during his retirement, Zapata ambushed by his hosts when arriving for a dinner party, Carranza murdered in his sleep in a lonely hut on the road to exile, Alvarado before a firing squad, Cedillo hunted to death in the hills ; Obregon, most curiously of all, was attacked by a pious young artist at a dinner table surrounded by his own adherents ; the boy was tortured before he was executed, but no explanation was ever published of the fact that while five cartridges were fired from his revolver, fourteen bullets were found in Obregon's body. Huerta died of his imprisonment in the U.S.A. It is popularly believed in Mexico that he was poisoned. The various rebels represented different elements of discontent. Cedillo and Carranza were of the type of rebel baron in King Stephen's reign, Zapata led a kind of 'ja'-querie' ; Villa was an intolerable blackguard, guilty of every conceivable public and private atrocity, who has lately been represented to the cinema-going public as a rough and generous Robin Hood ; Alvarado a hooligan of the type of the gangster bosses of Chicago in the '20s ; Calles and Obregon appear somewhat more presentable than most of their fellows, with strenuous political ambitions. The armies of these leaders included any kind of follower, fierce Yaqui Indians from the North, simple peons who had been told that by taking arms they would get land and liberty, professional soldiers following their immediate superiors, pure criminals ; besides these there was an organization which was to play an increasingly important part in local affairs—the ' Industrial Workers of the World ', later to be renamed less pretentiously the Confederation Regional de Obreros Mexicanos ; this society, popularly known as the CROM, had its headquarters in Vera Cruz with branches in all the industrial centres ; it is led by Morones who has made himself very rich by means of it. It was a part of the international communistic organization which developed in the great cities of the world twenty-five years ago. In recent years its importance has been overshadowed by the rival organization of Lombardo Toledano, the C.T.M., but for ten years it ruled Yucatan, Tabasco and Vera Cruz and exercised predominant influence on many occasions in Mexico City ; Obregon was its ally. It differed from other revolutionary organizations in its attitude to the Church ; to the Liberals the Church was something to rob ; robbery had to be justified by abuse ; but the revolutionary leaders often called for priests on the death bed, and encouraged their womenfolk to attend mass ; the CROM was fixedly and militantly atheistic and sought to destroy religion as such. It was also narrower in its aims ; the Liberals avowed a zeal for the general welfare, some of them almost exclusively for the majority, who lived on the soil ; the CROM aimed purely at the power of the small section who worked in industrial concerns, to destroy the commercial organization under which they worked and give them control of the wealth, and so of the policy of the nation. It is customary for writers, according to their views, to attach particular obloquy to one or other of these parties. The truth is that the atrocities committed by all were so many and so hideous that it is idle to differentiate. Poor Huerta has gone down to history with the label of ' bloodstained ', but his crimes seem mild in comparison with those of his successors.

President Wilson can hardly be blamed for not foreseeing these developments. All he knew was that a bad man was in power in Mexico ; he set about looking for a good one. So ill informed was he of local conditions that he flirted with the idea of backing Villa—from every conceivable point of view, patriotic, moral, international, the worst of the lot. Finally he decided on Carranza who had an amiable, almost a venerable appearance. He had been governor of the state of Coahuila under Diaz and ruled with the usual accompaniments of the padded army list, purchasable justice, and commercial graft ; he was no worse, perhaps rather better than the usual run of governors. He was prepared to back Madero provided he was left undisturbed ; he was prepared to back, had, in fact, already backed Huerta on the same terms. But Madero had squandered the savings of Diaz, Huerta needed money and did not want a disproportionate amount to fall into provincial hands. There was a disagreement about the sum of 50,000 pesos which Carranza had stolen from the banks, so Carranza declared against him and for the ' Constitutionalists '.

Huerta meanwhile carried on government of a kind and it became clear at Washington that more definite steps were needed to upset him. In February 1914 Wilson lifted the embargo on arms, thus ensuring, if not their victory, the ability of the ' Constitutionalists ' to remain in the field indefinitely. In April, on the flimsiest provocation, he went very much further ; he occupied Vera Cruz thus stopping a supply of arms that were due to be landed there for Huerta. This decided Huerta's fate, just as, three generations before, Miramon's had been decided at the same place, but the warlike intervention was not particularly welcome to Carranza. A curious situation ensued in which Wilson attempted to assist Carranza, first on certain conditions, then on no conditions at all, and Carranza continued to repudiate his help. Villa was already at war with Carranza ; he now cheerfully went to war on his own account with the United States ; with the arms the Americans had sent him he began a series of outrages along the border. On January 10th, 1916 he lined up sixteen American engineers at Santa Ysabel and shot them ; on March 9th he attacked the town of Columbus and burned it, murdering sixteen citizens. President Wilson ordered an army into Mexican territory to ' get Villa alive or dead '. They failed to get him. Carranza refused all co-operation ; General Pershing's expedition marched through empty country and finally withdrew ; Villa was pardoned and paid off by Carranza. Still President Wilson continued to ' recognize ' him. In March 1917 he was formally inaugurated as President. A party manifesto, known as ' the Constitution of Queretaro ' was promulgated. Carranza settled down to a brief but voluptuous period of authority, characterized by orgies, that have become fabulous, in the capital, and an abandonment of the provinces to gangster rule. It was during this period that Yucatan was reduced to permanent ruin by Alvarado. The persecution of the Church will be dealt with in a separate chapter. Here it may be noted that Carranza's attempt to stop it, more than any other cause, brought about his death. President Wilson was reluctant to admit the crimes of his protégés ; it was only after the facts had again and again been set before him and Catholic opinion in America was becoming seriously inflamed, that he sent a protest. He asked for three things : freedom for foreigners to pursue their businesses in peace ; an amnesty for political opponents ; a remission of the persecution of religion. 'Nothing will shock the civilized world more,' he wrote, 'than punitive and vindictive action towards priests or ministers of any Church, whether Catholic or Protestant ; and the Government of the United States ventures most respectfully but most earnestly to caution the leaders of the Mexican people on this delicate and vital matter. The treatment already said to have been accorded priests has had a most unfortunate effect on opinion outside of Mexico.'

Carranza accordingly went before the Congress in December 1918 to propose a modification of the 'Constitution of Queretaro' in favour of the Church. But Obregon had now entered into an alliance with the CROM ; the price for their support was the continued persecution of the Church. Obregon's supporters in Congress were therefore instructed to reject the amendments. Carranza was driven out and murdered. Once again American intervention had proved disastrous.

For the next few years United States policy took the form of mild hostility. A highly capable and honoured Ambassador, Mr. Sheffield, was charged with the disagreeable office of watching the steady deterioration of the country and at the same time of patiently pressing a long series of legal and financial claims against a government who would yield to nothing but force and were perfectly confident that force would not be employed against them. At last a new and very different Ambassador was sent to employ a very different policy.

5

At the time nothing seemed more brilliantly triumphant, in its results nothing has proved more futile than the policy of Dwight Morrow. He came as the bankers' agent to collect the debts which had been accumulating against the Mexican Government and to restore conditions in which American business men would be able to renew their activities. He rightly believed that it was no business of a foreign Ambassador to supervise the morals of the Government to which he was accredited. He arrived just at the time when Calles was not only beginning to weary of the demands of the CROM, but was also becoming scared at the tenacity with which the rural population was resisting CROM rule ; he wished to consolidate his private fortune, and put the country into a more workable condition. Morrow showed him a way to make his peace with big business and to keep his face at home. He was unique among not only his countrymen but all human kind, in being able to evince a personal affection for the President ; Calles responded and a period of mutual admiration ensued in which many points of disagreement were nominally settled. In fact none of the agreements have proved efficacious. Calles was saved by American assistance from one rebellion when the peasantry rose to defend their churches ; he was not saved from the communists. He got away, alive and rich. Morrow's diplomatic achievements collapsed with Calles. What survived was a new tradition of verbal geniality which is known as ' the Good Neighbour Policy '.

It is a policy which has had good results elsewhere and is naturally sympathetic to the warm heart of the race. American business men, as all who have had dealings with them gratefully acknowledge, dispense with both the honeyed flattery of Asia and the ponderous and often chilly courtesies of Europe, practising instead a particular kind of personal, man-to-man cordiality. It is taught I believe in the commercial courses at their Universities. Its aim is to convince the other party in a deal that you are negotiating, not for mutual, still less for exclusive, profit, but out of affection. You like him so much that you would sooner talk prices than not talk to him at all. It is a delightful convention for those who have plenty of time to spare and, in its best exponents, is something more than a convention ; it springs from a genuine broad bonhomie and a love of figures. Morrow, it seems, did really like General Calles ; and he liked Mexico. If he did not appreciate the highest achievements of Mexican architecture he, at any rate, liked peasant pottery ; he gave Sr. Diego Rivera an important commission ; he went around smiling and shaking hands ; the average Mexican was about his height and he was able to face the camera with his arms on peoples' shoulders, without appearing particularly foolish.

Now the Mexicans were not used to that kind of treatment from Americans. In the course of a hundred years their well founded pride had changed to an equally well founded feeling of inferiority. They expected to be treated as 'dagos' and 'greasers', to hear their government denounced as cruel and corrupt, their institutions as antiquated, their beliefs as childish and their domestic habits as disgusting. It was quite a new experience to be praised, and this heady, after-dinner oratory, prolonged next day and the day after in private utterances worked all too well. Those to whom the revolution had simply meant an advancement of personal fortune began to fancy themselves as philanthropists and statesmen; those who had lost by the revolution or had failed to obtain the promised benefits, hearing it praised by their censorious Northern neighbours, suddenly began to wonder whether, after all, there had not been some good in it which they had failed to notice. Every government propagandist could now enliven his speeches with quotations from U.S.A.

Morrow's present successor, Mr. Josephus Daniels, has been at his post during one of the most delicate periods of Mexican history. He has seen the Calles regime with which Morrow had come to terms, overthrown; he has seen the CROM and Morones reduced to secondary importance by the rise of the C.T.M. and Lombardo Toledano, the agriculture of the country failing, the communications dislocated, the currency discredited; he has seen the sensational theft of enormous American and European interests, the development of a will to pure mischief among the industrial workers and of despair among the rest of the population—and throughout has maintained an attitude of imperturbable urbanity.

Saved from embarrassment by his ignorance of Spanish, he has sat smiling on platforms where Marxist principles have been preached and applauded ; he has let his name be quoted as a supporter of the regime ; at the crucial time immediately following the expropriations, when the British Foreign Office was composing the first of its notes which led to the breaking of diplomatic relations ; while the State Department at Washington had still given no clear indication of the policy it intended to follow ; Mr. Daniels received a note from General Cardenas in the following terms : " *My Government considers that the attitude adopted by the Government of the United States in the matter of the expropriation of the petroleum companies reaffirms once more the sovereignty of the peoples of this Continent . . . By this attitude, Mr. Ambassador, your President and your people have won the esteem of the people of Mexico. The Mexican nation has lived in these last few days through moments of trial in which it did not know whether it would have to give rein to its patriotic feelings or to applaud an act of justice of the neighbouring country represented by your Excellency. Today my country is happy to celebrate without reservations the proof of friendship which it has received from yours, and which will be carried in the hearts of its people.*"

It was an audacious message. The Mexicans were rejoicing, but for all the fireworks and bonfires there was a feeling of apprehension. Like the infant Edmund Gosse when he said his prayers to a chair and waited to be struck from heaven, the people of Mexico had defied the powers that had dominated them for so long, and were waiting to see what would happen to them ; it was thus that they had stood, breathless, while the first Spanish missionaries threw down the old gods from their sanctuaries. A snub at that moment, a reminder that since the promulgation of the Monroe doctrine the United States had peculiar responsibilities for European interests in the Continent, a reminder, even, that the State Department at Washington had so far not defined its attitude in any terms which allowed of General Cardenas's interpretation, would have been sobering if not crushing. Mr. Daniels replied, ' I am gratified to have thus formally received this important expression of Mexico's deep friendship for my country . . . this feeling is mutual.' From then onwards, on every government platform, Mr. Daniels was quoted as a supporter.

Shortly after this he left for three months' holiday. It was thought in some quarters that he would not return, but at the end of June he was back, with his old infectious charm and benignity. By this time the enthusiasm for the expropriations had cooled. Prices had risen everywhere and Government speakers were finding their audiences less responsive. Mr. Cordell Hull had made no decisive statement on the oil question ; instead he had pointedly asked for a settlement of the debts incurred by previous revolutionary escapades. Neither the American nor the Mexican press was either optimistic or cordial. In particular the anti-Nazi *New York Times* had a correspondent in Mexico who was exposing some of General Cardenas's propaganda. It was noticed that Mr. Daniels adopted an unusually cautious tone with interviewers. But in the meantime other ' good neighbours ' with other motives were appearing. There was an influential little group interested in the marketing of the expropriated oil. The central figure of this group was a Mr. Davis, who for many years had been concerned with oil transactions independently of the main controlling groups. Davis had secured the post of middleman for the disposal of all the Mexican oil abroad. Negotiations were extremely difficult. Some oil was indisputably the property of the Mexican Government—the product of their own wells—and it was impossible to identify any particular shipment as being stolen property. The position of buyers and sellers varied at law in different countries ; cargoes had been distrained. Many countries refused to accept the imports and many buyers were reluctant to expose themselves to legal proceedings. The countries without scruples were also without foreign exchanges. It was unlikely that a permanent embargo could be maintained, but at the moment Davis' most hopeful market seemed the United States. Politically he was ' tied up ' with Senator Guffey, Mr. Walter A. Jones, and, through them, with the labour leader, John L. Lewis. As has been remarked above, it is difficult for a foreigner to understand the importance of these political-commercial alliances. He is disposed either to discount them altogether or to suppose that a formal conspiracy exists where in fact there is only an intermittent joviality. A few facts, for what they are worth, are certain. On August 22nd Davis was taken by Walter A. Jones to interview Cordell Hull. On September 4th the *Houston Post* reported the election of Walter A. Jones as President of the Good Neighbour League. Jones is described as ' Guffey's right bower '. He had ' a gilded cage at the Mayflower with vintages and Perfectos galore. Law makers were lured there. He gave a rich blowout to John L. Lewis, with 50 gilt edged guests . . . Jones knows all about coal and oil . . . and sees everything including the advantages of the Good Neighbour League as a strictly non-partisan mechanism for boosting the New Deal.'

On September 11th part of an American delegation arrived in Mexico City for the International Labour Congress. It consisted of Mr. John L. Lewis, Mr. Edwin S. Smith and Miss Mary Van Kleeck. On the same train with them was Margarita Nelkin, a Spanish communist. They were received by a guard of honour but with less popular enthusiasm than greeted Gonzales Peña and Leon Jouhaux. International socialists were common in Mexico City that week.

Miss Mary Van Kleeck is a well-known American radical ; Mr. Edwin S. Smith had been an associate of hers on the Russell Sage Foundation. He was nominally on holiday but his normal work is as a member of the National Labour Relations Board, a body which came into existence under the Wagner Act. This body is in some ways analogous in function to the notorious *Conciliacion* of Mexico. The Cardenas party were quick to seize upon this similarity and represent Smith as the mouthpiece of the New Deal. He was believed to be a close associate of President Roosevelt's and in some circles it was supposed that he had come to keep watch on John L. Lewis with the intention of preventing indiscretions which might embarrass the State Department. Any such expectations were disappointed.

From the first Mr. Smith was a very much more interesting figure to the Mexican politicians than Mr. Lewis. The Government were already abundantly assured of the goodwill of most of the labour organizations of the world. Cables had come to them in great numbers at the time of the expropriations, from powerful unions and modest study circles. They knew where they stood as far as 'proletarian' sympathies were concerned. What they did not know, and what neither they nor anyone else yet knows, is how powerful 'proletarian' sympathies were in influencing American foreign policy. Mr. Lewis travelled with some circumstance and it was noted without enthusiasm that while other delegates lived modestly in rooms that were costing them 10 or 12 pesos a day, Mr. Lewis engaged the most expensive suite at the town's principal hotel. Perhaps in this the Mexicans saw a certain likeness to their now discredited Morones. As a public speaker he had a forceful manner and the normal socialist matter. All the delegates at the Congress had much the same message to deliver in their different languages—the solidarity and certain victory of the working classes ; the identification of Fascism and capital which in more critical circles is becoming daily less tenable. But there was an element of awkwardness in Mr. Lewis's position. One of the chief grievances which the government agitators had been hammering on, in all their speeches, was the Mexican peon's degraded condition in comparison with the American workman's. Large, transparently intelligible diagrams had been issued contrasting the rates of wages that pertained on opposite sides of the border—the Yankee worker in his cap and overalls balancing on his palm two great coins representing 16·13 pesos ; the peon in jacket and sombrero gazing wistfully at three little discs representing 4·68. More than this, there had been another, widely circulated diagram showing the relative production of the two workers ; a great pile of 23 and a fraction barrels of oil (each representing 100 barrels) produced by the Mexican in a year ; the meagre crop of 7 and a bit produced by the Yankee. The various statistical manipulations required to justify these diagrams need not be examined here. The significant fact was that over a long period of time the C.T.M. organizers had been telling their men that the Yankees were paid enormously more than they for very much less work. Thus when Mr. Lewis sought to inflame a Mexican audience with tales of the oppression of the fascist-capitalists of his own country, the indignation he provoked was tepid.

Mr. Smith on the other hand was credited with disproportionate importance. He was a second Josephus Daniels come to judgment. When on the first day the Peruvian delegate, at a meeting in the Workers University advocated the internationalization of the Panama Canal, and Mr. Smith did not openly dissent, it was construed by many that the United States were agreeable to the proposal. On the second day of the Congress particular attention was paid, as it well might be, to the example set by the Mexican Labour Courts. A delegate, Arturo Martinez Adame said that their efficacy depended on ' correct revolutionary interpretation ' of the Labour Laws. Pressed to explain further, he said, ' Conscience decisions are based on justice and equity rather than on legal proofs and procedure. Consequently Governors of all states are ordered by the Federal Government to make sure that labour laws always act in favour to the workers.' To make the lesson still clearer to Mr.

Smith another delegate remarked that the United States would ‘ begin to get somewhere ’ when his National Labour Relations Board was ‘ fully developed ’.

Any doubts as to whether Mr. Smith found the atmosphere of the Congress sympathetic, were dispelled by his own speech. He drew a parallel between the United States and Mexico ; in both, he said, there was a capitalist structure of society and a government, based on proletarian principles, determined to revolutionize it by law. In Mexico the victory was almost won ; with the Wagner Act the United States had started on the same triumphal progress ; in the United States there was a further problem to be faced—the existence of a provincial bourgeoisie whose sympathies, misled by propaganda from the capitalist, ran counter to those of the proletarian. The official reports of Mr. Smith's various speeches were issued in somewhat different form in different languages. The English ‘ hand out ’ omitted many of his more violent expressions ; the Spanish, which was widely circulated in Mexico City, contained a specific approval of the oil expropriations, coupled with the ‘ boxed ’ notice that he was a representative of the United States Government. There seems some uncertainty whether the words were actually uttered in public. A number of questions were put to him which give the impression of having been prearranged ; it is likely that in his answers to these he was more explicit than in his actual speeches.

On the following Saturday, General Cardenas formally opened the Congress Against War and Fascism. The fact that his agents were at the moment feverishly negotiating for a trade pact to supply the Nazi bloc with the materials of war, was not mentioned during the proceedings. The meeting was staged with all the heraldry of Marxism. The motto of the Congress was displayed on a huge central banner : " *The alliance of organizations of workers in the service of the State salutes the proletariat of the world at these decisive moments when it is fighting against fascism and for the transformation of the capitalistic régime into a socialistic régime.*" Round it were a circle of banners bearing hammers and sickles, Soviet stars charged with the names of Lenin and Marx, ' Por la Lucha de Clases ' (For the Class-war) and similar devices. The *International* was sung and salutes were given with the clenched fist. On the platform with Mr. Smith sat other representatives of the United States—Miss Van Kleeck, Mr. Abe Isserman, the counsel for the CIO and the Civil Liberties Union, Mr. Nathaniel Weil, son-in-law of the New York newspaper proprietor Stein, and the Rev. Mr. Swafford representing the American League for Peace and Democracy.

Next morning there was a mass meeting in the Bull Ring which gave greater scope for the display of communist insignia. Mr. Smith spoke at the first of the meetings ; Mr. Lewis at both of them. He said, ' It makes no difference whether these avaricious capitalistic organizations are in the United States or in Mexico or in the countries of Europe, their attitude towards the workers and their tactics are the same. Recently there have appeared on the American continent two great statesmen whose sympathies cause them to extend a generous hand to workers of their respective countries. In the United States that man is President Roosevelt. In Mexico that man is President Cardenas . . . In Mexico we have seen under the regime of President Cardenas with profound satisfaction the enormous growth of the labour movement through the C.T.M. . . . and have witnessed how the natural resources of this country have been made available to the people of this country. The workers should so organize that what has taken place in the United States and Mexico can be achieved in all countries of Latin America.'

When this speech was delivered the chief concern of thoughtful people in Washington was precisely this ; that the successful confiscation of the oil properties in Mexico might lead to a wave of similar actions throughout Latin America and the absorption in the Nazi trade bloc of American interests. From Mr. Cordell Hull's point of view few utterances could have been more mischievous than this invitation to emulate Mexico, and the identification of Cardenas with Roosevelt, coming from the representative of 4,000,000 American workers whose livelihood would be the first to be threatened by the loss of South American export trade, in the presence of a representative of the United States administration.

Speaking at another meeting on the terms of Mr. Cordell Hull's note, Miss Van Kleeck said : ' In diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States the way appears now cleared for social and economic approach . . . Counterbalancing any suggestion that payment ' (for the expropriated properties) ' should be immediate is the thoroughly established policy of the Roosevelt

Administration for international co-operation. Co-operation is implied in the good neighbour policy and insistence on immediate payment without regard for the social and economic problems involved is objectionable, not only because it is unneighbourly but because it cannot be carried out . . . Mexico having embarked on a path of economic democracy has sovereign right to determine the course of its economic program.'

What were the delegates to make of all this? They varied in position from simple South American workmen to successful English novelists; the elderly and more astute of them had no doubt heard a great deal of this kind of oratory before; had affirmed proletarian solidarity in other days with Germans and Spanish and Italians; had heard fully accredited representatives of different states hold out hopes of co-operation which, for one reason or another, had come to nothing. But they were all socialists, and socialists live by hope; sometimes in one quarter of the heavens, sometimes another, the messianic dawn seems likely to break; they have learned to look in improbable places, and no one, listening to Mr. Smith and Mr. Lewis can have doubted that it was now from capitalist America that the lead was coming, and that the patient correspondence of the Washington State Department represented the last faltering tones of a dying regime.

A short time after the Congress, when war seemed imminent in Europe, I was talking to the Trinidadian delegate—who was not at all the ingenuous darky that his position might make one expect. I remarked that a European war would at any rate settle the Mexican question; that the United

States, sooner than see a supply of oil going to the central powers, would probably occupy the oil fields in the name of the companies. A kindly smile spread over the Trinidadian delegate's face. ' They might want to,' he said, ' but Lewis would never let them.'

Though nothing in his public statements justified it, Mr. Lewis certainly left the impression with many Mexicans that he was able and willing to paralyse any coercive measures against Mexico with a general strike. Americans tell me that such an idea is preposterous and that the American unions would never strike on an international issue. In Mexico, however, strikes are a national habit, extolled in the schools as one of the normal duties of citizenship, and practised for the most capricious reasons. To the Mexicans a boast of that kind, if it were made, would be perfectly credible. And large numbers of influential Mexicans believe it was made.

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Once more, at a crucial moment in Mexican history, when a choice was imminent between further violent experiment and a return to saner counsels, representatives from the United States have lent their influence to the disorderly side. One can be perfectly certain that of the many confused motives that inspired Mr. Smith and Mr. Lewis, one that was totally absent was the wish to imperial expansion. And yet it has been defined as America's ' manifest destiny ' to extend her rule to the isthmus of Panama. National destiny works out in curious ways ; empires seem to grow independently of individual ambitions. Is it conceivable that the historian explaining to future generations the reduction and disappearance of Mexico, may include in the succession of empire builders—Poinsett, Monroe, Houston, Ambassador Wilson and the rest—a chapter on the mid-twentieth century radicals ?

CHAPTER SIX

PLAN SEXENAL

I

IN the first half of September, 1938 the Mexican Government had two separate calls on its hospitality. There was a Cuban delegation who came, complete with a marine band, to take part in the celebrations of Independence Day, and there were the delegates to the Labour Congress. The nature of the entertainment was tactfully varied to suit the interests of the guests, and the impression which General Cardenas wished to make on them. To the Cubans he wished to appear principally as a patriot, the leader of Latin-American independence ; accordingly the armed forces were paraded with their latest equipment and an official party was given at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where, for the first time since General Cardenas's accession, evening dress was worn and members of the former aristocracy were coaxed out of their seclusion. It was a very grand party with a gay, costumed band, a splendid display of gold braid and jewellery, bright French dialogue, champagne, caviare, and press photographers. One might have been in Athens. The President himself did not attend, but all the more presentable members of his government were there chattering to Japanese admirals and Italian attachés in the most civilized fashion.

For the socialist delegates a different air was assumed. Their entertainment, particularly in the provinces, was profuse but less decorative. For them the President was no narrow patriot, but a lieutenant of the International, chief administrative worker of a Workers' State. An element of edification lay behind all their jaunts ; they were shown the swag of the recent confiscations, and, as though this was not enough, their guides enriched it with such imaginary features as a pipe line from the oil fields round Tampico, leading, they explained, to the Pacific coast, whence presumably it could be shipped to help the workers of Japan in their struggle for freedom against fascist China. But the main focus for their interest in Mexico City was the Six Year Plan Exhibition at the *Bellas Artes*.

British and American tourists are now well accustomed to being entertained by governmental exhibitions in which the commonplaces of our own individualist society are presented as the triumphs of one or other of the ideological parties. We even forget that we, too, have hospitals and infant schools and recreation grounds at home, so overwhelming is the gusto with which they are shown us abroad. But the *Plan Sexenal* was remarkable among exhibitions of its kind for its naïveté.

Under what is conveniently but loosely called ' the Mexican Constitution ', the President holds office for six years. After that the deluge ; sometimes assassination, sometimes execution, sometimes exile ; very rarely has a President retired into honourable private life in his own country. General Cardenas's predecessors were mostly content with a six year plan of collecting as much as they could of the public funds and banking them in their own names abroad. General Cardenas had more disinterested, if more mischievous ambitions. He came into power with the will to do so much damage in his six years to the existing financial structure of his country that it could never be reconstructed on the same lines ; primarily this meant doing on a universal scale what many of his predecessors had attempted in individual cases and abandoned in disillusionment ; the confiscation and redistribution of the land, the confiscation and socialization of industry. The word ' plan ' is an example of the borrowed and barely understood terminology in which Mexican political utterances abound. It was not a ' plan ' in the Soviet or Nazi sense of a vast co-ordination of production, exploitation and administration, the bureaucratic paradise of the Machine State. It merely meant a resolute determination to do as much as he could and damn the consequences. Instead of the ant-hill organization of Russia and Germany, he had at his service only the old gang of Calles and Obregon reinforced with a few revolutionary orators. It is not surprising that the results have been disastrous, but it is surprising that so much of the failure should be apparent in the Exhibition.

Nevertheless it was well attended ; school children were there, poor mites, led around and harangued by their masters ; that is inevitable. There were also numbers of workmen in their overalls—deputations sent up from the provinces by their local C.T.M. but a large proportion of the crowds on the two or three times that I went were, like myself, enquiring foreigners. Some no doubt were misled by the name *Sexenal* and having heard lurid stories of sexual education in the schools, were there in the hope of being shocked. A great number, however, were earnest students of the Left Book Club kind, who, abroad, will stare entranced at a cot or a blackboard if they have been told that they represent proletarian progress.

The Exhibition was divided into sections corresponding with the various departments of government—Health, Education, Agriculture and so on. The *Bellas Artes*, where it was held, is the imposing series of galleries which form part of the Opera House building. English-speaking guides were in attendance in the foyer. There were certain singular exhibits such as a great board on which were stuck the photographs of all the girls employed at the Ministry of Labour, but for the most part they conformed, in intention, to the European model ; there were statistics in the form of graphic diagrams, architects' plans for public works, trade exhibits showing the products of various industries, stalls for the distribution of propaganda leaflets and so on. At first sight it all seemed quite normal. Indeed it required some exertion to maintain an attitude of polite interest. On the first landing my guide and I passed a collection of carpentry tools. I am interested in carpentry tools so I paused to admire them. They seemed to be of excellent quality.

" These were made in Mexico ? "

" Certainly. Under the present government Mexican industry is making great progress."

I looked closer and was surprised to find the trademark of a well-known American firm. I pointed it out.

" Many American firms used to work in Mexico in the old days," the guide explained. " Now the government has taken them over."

" But these are all marked ' Made in U.S.A.'."

" Yes," he said. " I do not know why that is so. There are many more interesting things further on."

It is poor sport to bait official guides. Poor drudges, they are more bored than anyone by their work ; but I was genuinely puzzled and pressed for further information.

" I will ask one of the officials," he said, and returned after a time with the man in charge of the department ; together they examined the trade-marks and spoke rapidly in Spanish that I was unable to follow. At length the guide turned to me, reassured. " It is as I told you," he said. " They were all made in Mexico."

And there the matter rested. It had given me, however, a new line of interest. I no longer embarrassed us both by asking questions. I simply looked for trade-marks ; there were traffic lights made in U.S.A., hospital equipment from Germany, scientific instruments from Italy. Something like 80% of the exhibits were made abroad.

Now I do not suppose that in this matter the committee of the Exhibition had a fraudulent intention. I think that each department was asked to show what it had been doing ; they merely wanted to show that their cities had traffic lights, that their hospitals had operating theatres and their carpenters' shops planes and hammers. But there are two wider conclusions to be drawn from the incident ; first that the government is completely dependent on foreign imports for every branch of its life and secondly that local patriotism is so simple and ignorant that even quite responsible officials will not admit this primary economic fact.

In the department of Agriculture, however, the conduct of the exhibitors does not allow so charitable an explanation. There is a distinction to be drawn between legitimate propaganda and absolute falsehood which is generally observed in matters of commercial advertising and may well be applied to governments. To take an example from the Six Year Plan Exhibition : there was, as might have been expected, a hall devoted to the oil expropriations. The most lively minds in the republic are exercised with this question and this part of the show was more expensively and more cleverly arranged than any other. There was a model of a refinery complete with a toy train which ran ceaselessly round a circular track ; this attracted, as working models always do, constant attention, and all round it were placards painted with quotations from speeches, figures and diagrams giving, in admirably concise and intelligible form, the government's case. There was, for instance, a not wholly fanciful picture of three types of dwelling in existence in the oil fields ; the first a moderately roomy, two-storied house, the second a decent bungalow, and the third a dilapidated hovel. There were beside them diagrams showing what proportion of each kind of house was occupied by foreign and by native employees, drawing the apparently inescapable conclusion that the oil companies housed their foreign staff in comparative luxury and left the Mexicans in slums. The diagrams were astutely deceptive and yet, as far as they went, fairly accurate. No one disputed that the most responsible jobs in the old fields were held by foreigners ; the reason for this is not flattering to Mexican pride ; it was simply that they had learned by experience that they could not always trust the kind of Mexican who took up a commercial career. If a man goes abroad to work he expects to be compensated for his exile by a higher standard of life than he would enjoy in the same post at home ; that is a commonplace of commercial societies in all parts of the world. The foreign companies in Mexico do not import expensive employees from any disinterested desire to provide comfortable billets for their fellow countrymen. They do so because they have learned by experience that it is profitable. They can trust them to earn their salaries and to avoid deleterious local entanglements. In any country in the world—individualist, fascist or communist—the more responsible officials live in the more comfortable houses. That too is a commonplace. Therefore it was quite unexceptionable that the proportion of foreigners living in good houses should be higher than the proportion of Mexicans. But very many more Mexicans were employed than foreigners so that if the figures had been stated in the other way, i.e. the proportion of good houses occupied by Mexicans compared with the proportion occupied by foreigners, the result would be to show that Mexicans were greatly in the majority. Thus given a perfectly normal situation, the same figures can be used by either side in the controversy to support its argument, and both are employing legitimate methods of propaganda. In this particular matter of housing there are other considerations. There was the fact that the companies had been trying for years to build new quarters for their men and had been stopped by the C.T.M. There was also the fact that many Mexican workers preferred the housing allowance which the companies paid to a good house. It is usually an obnoxious, and certainly an outmoded, contention that the poor prefer living in slums. It is true, however, of many Mexican peons. At Orizaba I visited a colony of hovels, constructed, like inverted birdsnests, of bits of palm leaf and sacking and flattened petrol tins, into which well paid jute operators had moved in preference to the solid and sanitary quarters provided by the mill. It was not the business, however, of the organizers of the Exhibition to weaken their case by calling attention to these points ; that was the business of their opponents. They had made a very lively show in the oil section and may be honoured for their work.

The agricultural section, however, was quite another matter. Here, faced with damning and notorious facts, the ministry had resorted to pure invention. The facts were that agriculture was in a disastrous decline ; the exhibition merely stated the reverse, categorically.

In his various public speeches and in his notes to the State Department at Washington, General Cardenas has treated his land policy as a sacred mission to the fulfilment of which all other interests must be subordinate. It is an ambition with which, in general, there seemed grounds for sympathy. It is reasonable to regard the establishment of an independent peasantry as a primary source of national strength. The ills of modern society rise, not from the presence of private property, but from its absence ; too few people have tangible possessions ; a system in which a very few individuals, or, worse still, corporations, absorb all the sources of wealth, exhibits most of the disadvantages of socialism. In general the wish to see as many people as possible supporting their own families on their own holdings of land, is wholly laudable.

Those who enquire no further into General Cardenas's statesmanship than his avowed aims, have seldom any reason for withholding their applause. How far he is personally sincere in his professions no one has yet the right to give an opinion. Doctrinaire philanthropy is responsible for many ills. The outside observer must judge the results, not the motives. The simple fact, which is deducible from the published official figures and universally acknowledged in Mexico—except in the agricultural department of Plan Sexenal Exhibition—is that in the last two years agricultural production of every kind has fallen in volume by about 20% or 25%. The rural districts are no longer feeding the towns and at a time when other political and economic experiments are straining the national finances unendurably, Mexico is obliged to purchase its food in foreign exchanges. This would seem a surprising result of a land settlement scheme and its cause lies deep in Mexican conditions and history.

In the first place, there is plenty of land in Mexico. It is an enormous country varying in fertility from rich tropical and sub-tropical soil to bare rock. Experts are no longer as confident as they were twenty-five years ago in their apportionments of cultivable and uncultivable areas. Fascist enterprises in Italy and North Africa in draining marshes, watering deserts, binding loose sand and so on, have shown what land settlement means in efficient hands. Communists are cultivating the Arctic. It may well be that no part of the earth's surface is unredeemably infertile ; but in the case of Mexico there was never any need for heroic experiments. The country is sparsely populated ; its area is about 500,000,000 acres of which, it is estimated, about 58,000,000 acres can be cultivated by normal methods. Conditions of climate and soil vary so greatly from one part of the country to another that this area can produce crops of every kind—rice, sugar, cotton, coffee, maize, wheat, fruit, vegetables, etc. The population is less than 17,000,000. There is, therefore, no natural reason why there should be any shortage of foodstuffs. The explanation must be sought in social and political causes.

When the Spaniards came to Mexico they found a system of land tenure in the Aztec districts closely analogous to the manorial system of European feudalism ; great estates belonged to the crown, the priesthood and the military nobility ; the cultivators lived in village communities holding their land in common and paying regular dues in work and kind to their overlords ; there was also domestic slavery of the sort that had died out in most parts of Europe.

Under the mediæval Spanish system all property rights emanated from the Crown and reverted to it in default of direct heirs. This system was introduced into New Spain with little disturbance to the existing order. Enormous territories were granted to the heroes of the conquest, with sometimes more than 100,000 dependent natives over whom the recipient exercised almost sovereign powers. The Indians were not only serfs ; they were a conquered people, and in the earliest years of the colony there was a danger that they might be enslaved. Against this Pope and King legislated decisively. After mature examination of the specimens submitted the theologians came to the conclusion that they were human beings. Human beings can be treated atrociously and many in their time have envied the lot of well-kept animals. The human nature of the Indians did not in itself ensure them any particular advantage as far as physical conditions were concerned, but certain rights were declared to be inalienable ; though they were exempt from the Inquisition (a fact constantly forgotten by the painters of Mexico's modern historical frescoes), they were members of the Church which, as in Mediæval Europe, gave them the hope of advancement in the priesthood and in education, and ensured their right to marry and bring up their families ; they were never mated like animals as were the negro slaves of the English ; they shared in the holidays of the Church which provided frequent and extremely lively intervals in their lives of toil—this privilege was bitterly grudged by many of their overlords and helped to foster an anti-clerical sentiment among the colonists. They were also confirmed in the possession of their village lands. By royal ordinance all communities existing at the time of the conquest were granted land for their support in the immediate neighbourhood, which they worked when they were not fulfilling their duties for their overlords. As long as they remained in their native villages they had a protected position, if a subservient one. New introductions such as the plough, the horse, the wheel and the reduction of silver ore by mercury greatly increased the production of the country. The monasteries, greatly enlarged during the centuries by pious bequests, became in many cases horticultural and agricultural experimental farms as well as centres of learning. The introduction of negro slaves was forbidden, and although it existed in an underhand manner, never made a serious difference to the economy of the country. There was usually a shortage of labour, aggravated by the brutal conditions in many of the mines, and the colonists were constantly in search of devices for evading the laws ; against these the Spanish government waged a continual and, when difficulties of communication are considered, surprisingly successful war. The practice of tricking the Indians into slavery by debt was put down and did not re-emerge as a serious problem until after the Independence. The King's courts dealt out impartial justice. Henry Hawks, the first Englishman to visit New Spain, wrote in 1572, "*In Mexico the Indians are favoured by the judges. If any Spaniard does them an injury, despoiling them of anything (as is the common practice) and this happens in a pueblo in which there is a judge, the aggressor is punished just as if it had been done to another Spaniard.*" As the *encomienda* system of feudal holdings was found to be conducive of abuse, it became the royal policy to replace it by direct rule ; when from time to time heirs failed and estates escheated, they were not granted to new families, but divided into pueblos ruled by royal officials, the *corregidores*, and the struggle between colonists and crown took the new form, easy in a land of ill-defined boundaries, of attempted usurpations of pueblo lands by neighbouring *hacendados* (large landowners). It was not, however, until the independent nineteenth century that this became a real threat to the Indians' position. There is ample evidence to show that in places remote from the royal justice abominable cruelties were practised from time to time according to the character of the *hacendado ;* it has been to the interest of modern historians to emphasize these; similar atrocities were taking place in other parts of the world; in general it seems that until the Independence the case of the Indian villager was little heavier than that of the peasant in many parts of Europe and considerably lighter than that of the negroes on the British, Dutch and American plantations. It was however a condition which allowed of no deterioration without real distress and this deterioration came with Independence; the royal justice was abolished; the wide lands of the monasteries fell into secular hands; political intrigue and civil war brought a grosser type to the top and a process closely analogous to the landlordism of Tudor England squeezed the villagers of their essential rights; in particular debt-slavery became almost universal and the 'enclosures' of common lands proceeded unrestrained. From the middle of the nineteenth century until today the living conditions of the Mexican Indian have been as degraded as can be found in any except notoriously savage countries. At the time when Mexico was prosperous this argued a morbid condition. It is natural that it should inspire compassion, and sympathy for any effort to relieve it. Compassion, however, is not enough. In times of national ruin it is always the lowest class who suffer the most. The duty of a ruler should be to see that the community, as a unit, prospers and then to encourage the equitable distribution of wealth within the community. To ruin the whole nation in order to reduce the disproportionate prosperity of a part of it, is insane. That has been General Cardenas's policy.

Until a year or two ago the country was still organized, as it had been for centuries on the *hacienda* system. The *haciendas* were great feudal holdings including agricultural, urban and mineral properties. The *hacendados* were mostly of aristocratic Spanish origin, though in the course of the centuries the blood of most families had become mixed with native Indian. The *rancheros*—owners of less than two thousand acres—formed a peculiarly Mexican class, half yeoman half squireen, descended either from Spanish colonists of humbler origin or the illegitimate sons of the great landowners. They were predominantly Indian in blood ; in costume, manner and morals they were typical of the picturesque Mexican of the cinematograph. They did not send their sons to Stonyhurst or hold the bank at baccarat on the Riviera.

Those who denounce the old system most vigorously, often weaken their case by emphasizing the fewness of the fortunate minority. A handful of families, they point out, owned whole provinces ; some had never explored the full area of their possessions ; they lived lives of luxury in Paris and Biarritz while their estates were managed by ruthless agents. All this is substantially true in many cases and aroused moral indignation, but it does not provide a solution of the problem of poverty, for, after all, even the most ostentatious individual extravagances are a very small item in the budget of a prosperous nation. Under the Mexican system it needed an estate the size of an English county to keep one family in moderate luxury. No doubt it was very bad for the *hacendados* themselves to lead an idle and *deraciné* existence in Europe but the actual sums misappropriated from the national economy were negligible. Moreover it was only a minority of the minority who led an exclusively cosmopolitan life. The average *hacendado* spent some months every year on his estates. He did not regard them with the sentiment of an English landlord ; his principal house was in Mexico City ; his country house was his business premises and his holiday camp combined. He entertained there and played the *grand seigneur* among his dependants. Foreign visitors and diplomats have left accounts of these picturesque *barbecues* when the landlord feasted the village. Many *hacendados* took a patriarchal interest in their men and competed with one another in humane improvements. It was against these enlightened landlords, even more than the absentees, that the socialists worked, for they represented an alternative, saner solution to the problem. The agricultural new deal was based on the theory that the land originally belonged to the peasants, had been taken from them unjustly and should be restored. It has constantly been found in history that retrospective acts of justice, even after the lapse of a very few years, involve injustices greater than those they seek to remedy. General Cardenas is attempting to redress grievances of four centuries standing for which the historical grounds are extremely shadowy. The Spaniards found the Indian villagers in the condition of serfs. In the centuries they have themselves become Mexicans. There is no question of driving out a foreign invader but of dispossessing a class in the nation. The agrarian movement has been a part of the class war and as such has been a victory. Most of the landowners have been successfully stripped of their inherited and purchased property without compensation ; and the process is being hurriedly completed.

The process is as follows : A village makes a petition to the government that they have not enough land for their needs and they are immediately given a grant from the neighbouring estate, which they then work in most cases as small holdings, in a few districts in communal farms. The impetus has come not so much from the peasants themselves as from the government ; official inspectors have been sent all over the country organizing the petitions ; the Indians are simply told that there is a present of land waiting for them if they ask for it ; naturally they sign in enormous numbers ; when, however, as is more often the case than might be expected, they are reluctant to do so, either from affection for the *hacendado* or a traditional distrust of official philanthropy, the petition is made up by bogus names and by the importation of families from another district ; the original families are then transported to a place where they have no ties with their landlord and where, unless they are given land, they will starve.

A typical case is that of a friend of mine ; a middle-aged Mexican of pure Spanish descent, now reduced to extreme penury by the operation of the law. It is true that he was brought up in Europe, but not, in accordance with the popular legend, because his parents were leading a life of idleness in Monte Carlo ; they were serving their country as diplomats in various European capitals. He inherited a small estate from an uncle. This estate had not been acquired by graft or grant, but purchased from its previous owner. No Indians were dispossessed ; it was uninhabited at the time of the purchase. The uncle invested his capital in making a model plantation where formerly there had been rough pasture. He built a house for himself, a church, a village and a school, and induced landless peons to settle round him. He installed expensive machinery for treating the produce. Here he lived for the greater part of his life, experimenting with various types of plant and methods of culture until he had created a tolerably prosperous concern. When he visited his brother in Europe he came home laden with small presents for his Indians ; his return was celebrated with dances and feasts ; he personally supervised the education of the children and a simple medical service ; he was universally loved and respected. When my friend succeeded he carried on the same tradition. One morning a year or two ago he was visited by a government ' engineer ' from Mexico City who told him that a petition had been made and that his estate was to be divided. He was shown a list of names many of which were strange to him ; he challenged the ' engineer ' to produce the petitioners ; these were not forthcoming for the list was, substantially, a forgery. He appealed to the local governor who promised that he should be undisturbed until a genuine petition was made ; nevertheless the confiscation went on uninterrupted. He was left with his house, his mill, a few acres of land, and permission to gather and market the crop then ripening on the property. It was the practice of the planters at the beginning of the season to sell their crop in advance to the buyers ; this he had already done. Suddenly, and quite illegally, the ' engineer ' announced that the partition would take place immediately, before the harvest ; there was a further period of appeal with consequent lawyers' fees ; finally the confiscation took place as the engineer had said. In order to repay the money advanced by the buyer, the owner was obliged to sell off, precipitately and at a bad price, the house, machinery and the few acres remaining to him. He was left absolutely destitute.

We went together to visit his former home. The house was empty and the garden in decay ; a local politician had built a roadhouse on part of it. The land immediately round the house, which had been sold as a single unit to reimburse the buyer, was still tolerably well cultivated though the experimental plantation was no longer in use ; the remainder of the estate which had been divided into small holdings was already, in places, reverting to waste. Shade trees and cropping bushes, unpruned, were growing together half buried in weeds. In places they had been uprooted to make room for maize ; the Indians contented themselves by gathering the little fruit that still grew on the rank bushes ; where these had been smothered, the maize clearings would take their place. We found the old gardener who, on the assumption that he was too close to the patron, had not shared in the spoils. We asked him about the conditions of the people. He said they had no wages now and that many of them had left their holdings and drifted into the town. The others did not bother to grow more than a bare subsistence for themselves ; if they did the government claimed it in repayment for the tools and seeds they had been lent ; when they were in need of ready cash they set off to the hills and made charcoal.

We drove back in a sombre mood, my friend oppressed not only with his own loss but by the spectacle of wanton neglect ; he had lost everything and no one was the better off for it.

Heaven knows, one cannot talk of sympathy being wasted, but sometimes when I find my newspapers day after day full of appeals, handsomely supported and eloquently canvassed, for the victims of totalitarian rule in Central Europe ; when I read letters from English socialists, half of whose time is devoted to denying the rights of private property for their fellow countrymen, savagely denouncing Nazi confiscations of Jewish shops and factories ; I think of my friends in Mexico who also have been ruined and outlawed, and have received nothing from the democratic peoples except smug suggestions that they and their ancestors have brought things on themselves.

The incident quoted is typical both of the injustice and the futility of the agrarian scheme.

In the case of my friend only a modest ranch was involved ; hence the extreme speed with which it was swallowed. The great *haciendas* took longer and the process was perhaps the more painful to their owners. First one area, then another would be taken. The owner was often assured that if he relinquished part of his property without dispute he would be left with the remainder ; the policy of the government officials was to wait until the *hacendado* had concentrated his energy upon developing a particular area and then confiscate it. It was three or four years before he was left quite landless. Even now there are huge territories remaining to be divided. The most reliable figures seem to be as follows : up to August 1938, 54,210,790 acres had been distributed, of which about 23,300,000 acres were cultivated land; that is about 40% of the total cultivable land of the country. Recent confiscations should account for a further 10%. Agricultural production has fallen by about a quarter; it is therefore to be expected that when the process of confiscation is complete—and there is every indication that it is being hurried forward—production will be at about half its former extent. The estates still remaining in their former hands consist of those owned by generals, local governors and members of parliament and by certain influential German companies in the extreme South. Since my return there have been brief notices in the English papers of the confiscation, against the clearly expressed wishes of the local Indians, of a large and conspicuously benevolent Italian property in the North. No pretence has been made at discrimination against bad landlords; on the contrary those who set the best example have been the first to suffer. Nor has any distinction been made between the various rights of possession. Some properties were undoubtedly illegally augmented in the time of Porfirio Diaz; some traced undisputed possession to the time of Cortes; some were recently acquired by purchase. All have been treated alike. The government campaign is against property as such and against landowners as a class politically opposed to themselves.

Of the former landowning class, those still left in possession, or part possession, know that their turn is coming and can only wait gloomily until the 'engineers' have the time to attend to them. I visited a ranch in another State where the owner's son was carrying on a dairy farm on about a third of his former property. He showed me one large piece of land that had been taken from him by the Ministry of Education ; a small school had been erected in a corner of it, the rest was lying idle ; near the house was another field which, many years before, his father had given at their request to the municipality for the extension of the hospital ; some half finished masonry like an ornamental ruin stood deep in undergrowth. His own house was quarter furnished and his cow houses in bad repair. He was an energetic young man full of plans for their improvement. "What is the good," he said. "If I make it attractive the government will take it away. My only chance of holding on for a little longer is to escape notice. If it looks worth stealing I shall lose it."

All round Orizaba we visited partitioned estates. The valley of Orizaba is one of the most beautiful and naturally fertile districts in Mexico. It is particularly well placed for communication. Through it run the main road and the railway between Mexico City and Vera Cruz. Ten years ago there were miles of rich sugar and coffee estates. We drove through a devastated area. The sugar mills and ranch houses were in ruins ; acre upon acre of sugar land was lying waste ; here and there a few puny animals were grazing ; here and there were patches of maize ; along the roads came women and donkeys laden with charcoal—most fatally destructive of all industries ; soon the hillsides, which might have been terraced into acres of fertile land, would be stripped of their cover and washed bare of soil. Indians who wanted money tramped into town to work in the cotton and jute mills, which the trade union officials were vigorously endeavouring to reduce to bankruptcy. The great industry of Orizaba was the brewery under Government management ; the beer is as good as any in the world ; work there is being held up because the rice fields, now mostly working under government auspices, had fallen in production and could not deliver what they had contracted for.

People I talked to in Mexico City had sought to impress me with the decay of agriculture resulting from the partitions. In order to verify this, I had first asked my hosts whether they could show me any of these lands that were going out of cultivation. After a morning's drive round the countryside I had to alter my request ; could they show me any of the new holdings which were being properly worked ? With some difficulty we found a number. The farming was not of a high order ; the conditions of living seemed little, if at all, different from elsewhere in the country ; the huts were very like the official caricatures of housing on the oil fields, but there was evidence that the family in their way were taking pride in their property, or at least were content in its possession, and, on inquiry, we found that by selling their surplus produce to the government clearing houses, they were making rather more than their former wages, even when they had repaid the government loans for seed and tools. It was a small proportion but one very well worth legislating for.

It was natural that conversation outside Mexico City should turn continually to the agricultural plan, even to the exclusion of the ever present question of oil. A certain number of Mexicans maintained an uncompromising attitude ; the

Indians were incapable of looking after themselves ; they would not work unless they were made to ; they had been happy on the *haciendas ;* the *hacendado* had been a father to them ; they told anecdotes illustrating the loyalty and love that they had inspired among their former dependants. Government supporters—notably American ladies living on invested capital—quoted Gruening on ' land hunger ', accepted the desirability of land distribution as their premise, and judged the government purely on its record in expediting the work. They admitted that numerous politicians had so far escaped confiscation, deplored the fact as a relic of Calles's day, and looked forward to its speedy redress. Others, indifferent to social conditions, found a melancholy relish in the agricultural figures and plight of the Agricultural Banks, as full evidence of General Cardenas's incapacity. But the vast majority, Mexican and foreign alike, agreed that there was the need for an agricultural policy and that General Cardenas had chosen a particularly unhappy one ; chosen, not devised, for the policy was not in fact General Cardenas's invention. In theory it was the work of his predecessors. General Cardenas's guilt merely consists in taking their professions literally, in trying to put them into practice and in persisting in the attempt after its folly had been proved.

There were two aims for a Mexican statesman ; first the economic one of maintaining and increasing production. In this General Cardenas's policy has been manifestly disastrous. The reasons for its failure are first that after centuries of peonage only exceptional members of a depressed class will have the initiative, foresight, thrift and resolution to become successful independent farmers ; the instinct of the average peon, presented with his land, has been to squat in a corner of it and produce with the least trouble enough to keep himself and his family alive. Secondly, certain crops such as henequen require capital and skill ; the peon has little interest in anything that is not immediately edible. Thirdly, after decades of misgovernment and revolution the administration is in the hands of a group who are both incapable and malicious ; their aim has been more to destroy the rich than benefit the poor ; they have preferred to extinguish sources of wealth rather than leave them in the hands of political opponents ; even the peon has an inherited mistrust of the government, cannot believe that its benefactions are disinterested, and has learned to fear that if he produces any surplus someone will come and steal it. Fourthly, the drastic shiftings of population necessitated by the vindictive nature of the policy have resulted in many agrarians being isolated in small, defenceless colonies in parts of the country where they find the inhabitants foreign and hostile. There have been so many cases of attacks on the new settlers that the government has in many districts been obliged to arm them and hundreds have drifted to the towns rather than live in such inhospitable surroundings. Thus at a time when General Cardenas's other experiments make it most difficult to purchase supplies abroad he is faced with a grave food shortage. His new Nazi associates can send him cameras and binoculars and aeroplanes, but not grain nor the money with which to buy it.

There was, moreover, the social problem of improving the condition of the peons. The lot of many of them was both to work hard and to live in destitution, thus getting the worst of both worlds ; they paid the penalties without enjoying the privilege of idleness. But it is a poor solution simply to encourage them to be idle ; it seems certain that some kind of discipline is necessary to keep them at work ; the function of government should be to see they are compensated for it ; the form of discipline they understood was that of the *hacienda ;* those who have the qualities to become yeomen should by all means be enabled to do so ; those whose mentality is still formed in the traditional loyalties of parish and *hacienda*, should be ensured a suitable reward for their labour. Above all some sense of security of tenure which at the moment no one in Mexico, peon or *hacendado*, feels, is essential to successful agriculture ; no man works to develop land which may be taken from him capriciously by a change of government. When the Cardenas group came into power there was plenty of land to spare in Mexico and there was an existing social structure which was well understood by all. It would not have been impossible to devise a policy which included the aims suggested above. The *hacienda* organization could have been left substantially intact with the individual patron as the nucleus of social service and discipline ; land that was lying idle could have been appropriated and developed, as Italy and North Africa have been, by state directed enterprises of drainage and irrigation ; on these an alternative system of small holdings could have been developed, with whom the *hacendados* would be obliged to compete in amenities in order to maintain their labour supply. The government could have reassumed the position of the Spanish Monarchy as a fount of justice to prevent exploitation and the infringement of such laws as were found necessary to protect the Indians' well-being. Special taxation might have been imposed on absentee landlords. It is an open question whether the Indian peon can, in his present position, be treated as a responsible citizen capable of having equal obligations with the *mestizo* and the white, or whether he needs special protection. A policy such as has been suggested above would allow for the emergence of the more self-reliant strains of the population, while ensuring the national food supply, and, properly administered, would have been welcome to most of the *hacendados*. It was not however a policy which could happily be combined with subservience to the C.T.M. and its crusade of class war or with the vendettas of the Lodges.

Meanwhile General Cardenas still represents his land policy as the first aim to which other national interests must be subordinate and advertises the extent to which he has carried it.

2

Another department of the Six Year Plan Exhibition which was of particular significance, was the Educational section. As has been said above, the mid-nineteenth century confiscations of the educational and charitable endowments of three hundred years created a gap in Mexican development that has never been filled ; from being, in its continent, outstandingly cultured, the country became notoriously barbarous. Many *hacendados* maintained small private schools for their dependants ; here and there in the time of Diaz the religious orders, though still officially proscribed, returned to their work with the connivance of the governors and began patiently restoring the tradition that had been disturbed. Generally speaking, however, the peons remained illiterate and those Mexicans who could afford it, sent their sons to school abroad. A vigorous educational policy was needed and General Cardenas's zeal is undoubted ; a great part of the work he hopes to do is laudable. The truth, however, is that he has been able to do very little, and that little has been largely nullified by weaknesses inherent in the principles on which he is working.

The exhibits included some examples of school furniture, painted with animals from Walt Disney films, examples of children's work and of their textbooks and plans and models of school buildings. With regard to the latter it must be remembered that no very clear distinction was made between what had been done and what was proposed. A cursory inspection was calculated to give the impression that the whole country abounded in new, concrete and glass, functional school houses, a small fraction of which had in fact been erected. Moreover the organizers had been none too scrupulous in their attribution of the work of others to the Government Plan. For example there is on the road to Guadalupe a prominent and very imposing girls' school which cannot fail to attract the notice of passers-by. This great building is the creation of private charity. A wealthy and pious couple having lost their only child, decided to devote their fortune to a free boarding school for poor Mexican girls. They themselves planned every detail of it and left in their will that its management should be entrusted to a committee whom they could rely upon to carry out their intention. It was intended to be more than a single benefaction, but a model which might be followed by others. It is a magnificent place unlike anything that had been seen before in Mexico—gardens, swimming bath, playing fields, laundry, kitchens, dormitories, library, class-rooms, workshops are all equipped on the scale and quality of the most expensive European and American establishments. The girls, coming to it, are furnished with clothes, books, even toothbrushes, entirely free. One feature is absent, a chapel, for religious instruction or practice of any kind is forbidden in any kind of school; the girls may not even say grace after their meals. The name, even, had to be changed by government order, for the founders had wished to dedicate it to a saint and that was illegal. For some years this institution has occupied a peculiar and precarious position. It is by law the property of the state and subject to state inspection; the staff are, however, still those appointed by the benefactors. At any moment they may be discharged and replaced by officials from the Ministry of Education. The government is watching them for a suitable excuse; girls have been visited at home and questioned about their religious beliefs in the hope that they may be trapped into an admission that their teachers are sympathetic to religion. When, therefore, some weeks before the Exhibition, the school was unexpectedly visited by a formidable deputation from the office of education, the staff feared the worst. To their relief the invasion proved to have no more sinister intention than to photograph the place in order to display it as an example of General Cardenas's initiative.

The Government, with so many expensive projects on its hands, can scarcely be blamed for not having built more. What it has done, with abundant energy, is to send out from Mexico City an army of enthusiastic teachers, many of whom have suffered acutely, losing noses, ears and occasionally their lives at the hands of the ungrateful parents. For the education ordained by the Government is strictly ideological ; and its aim primarily to shake surviving religious and moral prejudices and glorify the personnel of the dominant regime.

Alarming stories are told by opponents of General Cardenas about the impropriety of the instruction in his schools. Boys and girls are said to be stripped and exhibited naked to mixed physiology classes. I confess I find it hard to credit. There were numerous examples of the government's hygienic propoganda on view at the Exhibition and it seemed perfectly inoffensive—lively little drawings commending the use of soap and toothbrush, grim warnings that are certainly needed in Mexico of the dangers of venereal disease, advice about nutritive diets and the extermination of bed bugs—the latter could with advantage be studied by the managers of at least two of the leading tourist hotels. The fact remains, however, that the new school-teachers do seem to have aroused storms of spontaneous moral indignation in a people not unaccustomed to libidinous officials. I cannot help thinking that it is in their supercilious attitude of brand-new city-made enlightenment and their avowed wish to make the children critical of their homes that the chief grounds of their unpopularity must be sought.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that the Ministry of Education, which is largely the creation of a fanatical fellow called Portes Gil, does represent the most extreme opinions in the country. This is true nearly everywhere ; a great proportion of militant communists are or have been teachers ; partly because those who hold their opinions very enthusiastically, rightly regard school-teaching as the best chance of propagating them and partly because there is something about the work itself which sensibly inclines the mind to bigotry. The analogy between school and state is facile ; the need for reducing all problems to their simplest terms tends to the acceptance of ready-made solutions ; the necessity for selecting facts and arranging them memorably ; the ambition to provoke enthusiasm of any kind in dull little minds ; the unremitting association with the immature ; the peculiar social position of the school-master in a remote district—the lonely intellectual closeted of an evening with his books, so like, it is pleasant to believe, the exiled Marx in the British Museum Reading-Room ; the longing to believe that he is making some mark in the world, preparing a new generation for a new order, not just earning a meagre wage by forcing into unwilling heads facts that will soon be forgotten ; the ever present anxiety about keeping order predisposing the mind to a system of absolute decrees, secret police and summary executions—all these considerations, no doubt, contribute to make school-masters and mistresses a subversive race.

At the Six Year Plan Exhibition no attempt was made to disguise the Marxist character of the state education. Even the products of the infant schools showed the hammer and the sickle, and the clenched fist represented in a variety of simple handicrafts.

I made a small collection of the publications of the Ministry of Education. They are mostly very well produced. There is a series of alphabets—*Carteles de alfabetizacion*—octavo sheets, printed in red and blue, comprising on one side the characters of the alphabet and on the other certain elementary instruction. One number opens with an exhortation to revere the teacher (and not to cut off his ears). 'The rural master,' it says, 'has been the victim of the tendencious propaganda of Reaction, which attacks the Socialist School. The heroic rural master, nevertheless, has remained at his post, advancing and realizing his magnificent, highly patriotic and humane labour. He is the veritable apostle of the Socialist School . . . Countryman, spread in the rural population gratitude for his altruistic and self-denying work which aims only at the well-being of the community.' On the next page is a large drawing of a clenched fist with the legend : 'We protest. The Proletarian protests against physical and moral misery, insufficient salaries, the worst food, etc.' Opposite it is a drawing of a personable young man bearing the banner of the C.T.M. Below it : 'The C.T.M. is a national, syndical front in the class war in the service of the Mexican Proletariat' and a brief, enthusiastic summary of its work against 'the semi-feudal structure of the country', 'the intervention of imperialist powers', 'reaction' and 'fascism'. Another page is decorated with a hammer and sickle and a snake and an exposition of 'the Origin of the Class War.'

Another edition of the alphabet has the picture of a boy under a shower-bath with an appeal against the 'horror which is felt against water and washing' and a list of the benefits of the daily bath which among other things 'stimulates the spirit'. There is also a diagram, in the best fascist spirit, against the evils of slouching, and a page devoted to the dangers of dust. Opposite these salutary lessons are two political pages; one shows a workman carrying the banner of the strike (*Huelga*). 'Comrades, the right to strike is positively a constitutional right'; the other a voter putting his paper into the ballot box of the P.R.M. (*Partido de la Revolution Mexicana*). It is idle to speculate what would be the outcry in a democratic country if the government in power attempted to introduce party politics into the school curriculum in this way.

There is a children's magazine—*Periodico Infantile* named *Palomilla*—issued by the Ministry of Education; it consists largely of contributions by children and articles about hobbies. The centre —like the Tiger Tim supplement in the magazines of English childhood—consists of a double coloured page of picture-story. In the second issue of this magazine the story is as follows: the first eight pictures contrast the lot of the rich and poor; the poor woman works washing clothes while the rich lady, attended by three caddies, foozles her drive at golf; the man dressed as a chef prepares a luxurious dinner while the millionaires dressed in fur coats, white gloves and top hats (an object, never seen in Mexico, whose presence in the cartoon suggests foreign origin) and smoking large cigars are concerned only with 'jokes and holidays'; the daughter of the poor family makes clothes for the rich girl to wear in her motor-car; the poor child mends the dolls which the rich one breaks.

The last two pictures offer the remedy for this invidious social division. The poor family makes itself into a syndicate ; we see their simple room decorated with red flags and hammer and sickle ; the father of the family thumps the table commanding the attention of his womenfolk ; finally comes the great Mexican panacea—*se declara en huelga ;* the black and red flag of the strike is hung across the gates of the rich man's villa and the poor family sits idle outside. It is an interesting variation on the exemplary tales of the Victorian nursery in which by self-denial and industry the poor man raised himself until he, too, was able to treat of 'jokes and holidays' and send his wife out to the links.

It would be tedious to multiply examples to prove a case which no one seriously disputes. Mexican education, like that of all the totalitarian states, is planned with the primary intention of 'conditioning' the children in the interests of the political regime ; transpose national expansion for class war and you have a system very similar to that of modern Germany. The school-teacher in the small towns is the agent of government propaganda. It is his duty to educate people of all ages, to read them the news from the capital with appropriate comments, to promulgate presidential decrees, to stimulate hostility to foreigners and gentlemen, to nose out and report evidence of religion or political disaffection, to embody, in his own person, the virtues of the Six Year Plan ; to his friends he is, in the words quoted above, 'the heroic rural master advancing and realizing his magnificent, highly patriotic and humane labour . . . a veritable apostle' ; to his enemies he is a professional prig and spy. The reports of travellers from the interior seem to agree that in most places where he has been allowed to remain he is carrying out the work for which he was appointed with greater thoroughness than is shown by most Mexican officials. He has profited by the popularity of the government in places and at times when it has been popular. He suffers from the general displeasure when things go wrong. As things go progressively more wrong it is probable that he will suffer more and that he will be the victim of the next rising—a martyr to noble principles,—a martyr to General Cardenas's conceit,—just a mischievous ass getting his deserts—according as you like to look at him,—but doomed, I am afraid, to an unhappy end. This is not the place to debate the first principles of politics, and it is by these he must be judged. The practical question does, however, arise ; what apparent effect is the educational drive having on the present generation of Mexican children ?

The answer, of course, varies in different parts of that vast country. In the rural districts, as has been mentioned above, the reception has been so hostile that the Government has sometimes had to abandon or modify its policy. There is moreover an underground organization of teachers who refuse to concern themselves with politics and are actively, at great personal risk, continuing religious instruction in spite of the Government ban. As is to be expected, the communist schools are most influential in the large towns where the C.T.M. organizers can keep a watch on them and the C.T.M. parents are sympathetic. Here, the evidence is overwhelming, political theory has so far dominated the ordinary school curriculum that the standard of general culture and information has deteriorated from its previous low standard, while discipline has almost ceased to exist.

The teachers have not made their own lot easier by the principles they support. The right to strike is taught as a civic duty and the children practise it enthusiastically. The formation of school syndicates is far from being a game ; every large school has its student organization analogous to the C.T.M. Meetings are called with great frequency during school hours and the children spend their time lobbying for votes and making speeches to one another. The school becomes a factory in microcosm, reproducing all the disorder of Mexican industrial conditions. A children's committee demands an equal share in the management of the school and to their chagrin the teachers find that in the immature mind, they, more often than not, occupy the position of employers and the children that of the proletariat ; the syndicates which they encouraged have become a machinery for enforcing changes of curriculum and personnel. Strikes are called to protest against imagined cases of favouritism, against severity in examinations, against personalities that are generally unsympathetic, and—a still more mischievous source of wasted time—against the doings of foreign governments. While I was in Mexico, Vasconcelos, a journalist and former Mexican minister of education, who had been teaching in the United States, lost his job. Vasconcelos is far from being the model Marxist which General Cardenas's ministry of education is trying to popularize ; he was a patriotic rather than a proletarian leader ; in his exile he had said some very hard things about General Cardenas. Nevertheless the children of Mexico had a strike and a demonstration against the 'Yankee imperialist fascism' of President Roosevelt in sending him home.

The children do not stop at words. The headmaster of the Preparatory School—the chief secondary school of the country—was lately physically ejected by his pupils; the girls are said to have taken a ferocious part in maltreating the poor fellow.

It is not surprising that in this atmosphere serious studies languish. The worst results are evident at the University. The Royal and Pontifical University, which held rank with that of Salamanca, and was for centuries the main centre of learning in the New World, had an unhappy history during the nineteenth century. It was closed in 1833 by the radical Gomez Farias, reopened in 1834 by Santa Anna, closed again by Comonfort in 1857, opened again by Zuloaga in 1858, closed by Juarez in 1861, opened and shut again by Maximilian. As on a Sunday in the United States the train bar opens and shuts in accordance with the moral feelings of the State through whose territory one is passing, so the University's existence varied with the prejudices of the governing gang. The existing University is its successor, holding at the moment a somewhat anomalous position of semi-independence; there are 15,000 students few of whom have any ambitions to scholarship; they are qualifying for certificates and diplomas which will enable them to get government posts; they contribute little or nothing towards their education. The institution subsists on some small endowments that have survived its former proud possessions and on capricious grants from the Government. The salaries of the professors and tutors are miserable and, even so, are irregularly paid. The combined salaries of the two important chairs, for example, amount to 130 pesos a month—at the present rate of exchange a little over £6. As works of scholarship have to be bought with foreign currency, there is some considerable difficulty for the professors in keeping abreast of recent research. The total grant for the purchase of books for all subjects, technical and humane, is 400 pesos a year, and there is a recurring annual struggle to secure its payment. Foreign languages have ceased to be an essential part of the curriculum. As almost all the authorities for the courses are in French, English, Latin, German or Italian, lectures are given without bibliographies ; the library does not stock the books and the students could not read them if it did. Lectures, in fact, consist purely of dictated notes for the answers to examination questions.

Disorder is grossly rampant. The authority of the University is vested in a Council on which a students' committee has a 50% voting power. Meetings are held in public, to the accompaniment of munching, singing, whistling, the throwing of ink pellets and fireworks, with the governing body so hemmed that they can barely raise their hands to vote. Last year the entire faculty except two, was expelled by the students, and in the last seven years only one Rector has retired normally with comparative honour.

It is gloomy atmosphere for those teachers—and there are a few of them left—who have tasted the sweets of a life of real scholarship, but they at least have the compensations of their own finely made minds ; what is the prospect for the wretched youths brought up to know nothing better ? What equipment have they to inherit the world that General Cardenas is preparing for them ?

There is much to be said in a very stable, prosperous, self-satisfied society for the presence of a Bohemian student body. It is a thing we have always lacked in England. One of the good effects of discipline should be to provoke a healthy resistance in the more enterprising and self-reliant spirits. It is impossible to regard the Mexican student disorders in these humane terms. The next generation is growing up without any intellectual or moral standards and they will come to manhood in a country faced with every possible internal and external problem in its most acute form.

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There are other features of General Cardenas's Six Year Plan whose beginnings could be traced in the Exhibition. The President, in his electional campaign, toured the country, enquired into the particular local needs and promised attention—a road was needed here, a canal there ; it should be done. It was in fact begun. Then came the oil confiscations and the cessation of public works all over the country.

The last traveller to publish an account—and a brilliant one—of conditions in the remote provinces of Mexico is Mr. Graham Greene. His *Lawless Roads* is an appalling account of the mismanagement and miseries which are kept hidden from less courageous travellers ; it is all the more damning for its author's obvious antagonism to capitalist society. This is his description of the public works at Las Casas—the former capital of the State of Chiapas. "*Herr F. led me over the rocks to show me examples of Mexican engineering. First the reservoir half finished standing there to crack into ruin in the winter because there was no more money : all money was diverted to Tampico and the oil-fields . . . Seven years ago there had been a disastrous flood. Herr F. had been in charge of relief operations ; he showed me the overgrown, neglected canal he had dug at the cost of only fifty pounds. Then Cardenas visited Las Casas ; he was not yet president, he was on his electoral tour, and he had promised, if he were elected, men and money. He kept his promise : money poured into Las Casas : federal engineers began the work all over again : the walls were made of loose rocks stuck into cracking cement : in the next rains the walls themselves would help to block the channel. Then as a contrast he showed me what the Spaniards had built eighty years ago. The fine masonry of General Utrillo stood intact : only the alteration in the level of the land made his works out of date.*"

There's the rub ; the hopeless, universal deterioration of things in Mexico ; that is what changes General Cardenas's futile little exhibition from farce to tragedy. The purser on board the *Siboney* had cautioned us to be tolerant of Mexican conditions. "They are doing their best . . ."

If Mexico were a small, new country, just emerging from barbarism, house-proud of its little achievements, pardonably anxious to conceal the evidence where zeal had outrun capacity, then, indeed, it would be ungenerous to wound the national pride and abuse hospitality by uncovering its failures. But it is nothing of the kind. It is a huge country with a long and proud history, taking precedence in its national unity of half the states of Europe ; it has been rich and cultured and orderly and has given birth to sons illustrious in every walk of life ; now, every year, it is becoming hungrier, wickeder, and more hopeless ; the great buildings of the past are falling in ruins ; the jungle is closing in and the graves of the pioneers are lost in the undergrowth ; the people are shrinking back to the river-banks and railheads ; they are being starved in the mountains and shot in back-yards, dying without God. And General Cardenas and his gang stand on their balcony smirking at the applause of communist delegations ; the tourists tramp round the Exhibition of his work marvelling at hammers and sickles in cross-stitch and clenched fists in plaster of Paris and the plans of monstrous public offices that no one is ever going to build.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRAIGHT FIGHT

I

IT is a common complaint against Catholics that they intrude their religion into every discussion, postulating a 'Church Question' in matters which seem to have no theological connexion. This is, in a way, true; the Catholic's life is bounded and directed by his creed at every turn and reminders of this fact may well prove tedious to his protestant or agnostic neighbours. In the case of Mexico, however, no apology is needed for speaking of the subject. It is not land or oil or race or political organization but religion which is the single, essential question of the nation, and foreign writers may be judged, as to how far they grasp the character of the place, pretty well by the importance they attach to it. Those who regard the religion of the people as a picturesque, quaint local custom or as a mildly deleterious survival of an earlier age, to be gently discouraged and superseded by a more rational ethical outlook, can have little of interest to say about any Mexican topic. The issue is simple enough. There are, it is true non-Catholic missions of various sects in Mexico handsomely provided with funds from the United States. It is their good fortune to be able to distribute alms where the native clergy have to ask for them; they collect fair sized congregations and do considerable work in relieving distress and encouraging hygienic habits ; their influence in the life of the people, however, is so slight and the possibility of their ever founding a national, evangelical church which could exist independently of American financial aid, is so inconceivably remote, that the authorities do not take the trouble to suppress them. They provide useful testimony for Government propagandists of the kind that was lately heard from Barcelona, that the government is not opposed to Christianity as such—only to political priests. There are also pagans ; Indians descended from communities where the Spanish missionaries never penetrated, or those who have for generations been cut off from the life of the Church and have lapsed into animism and odd superstitions. But for the purpose of any fruitful discussion the politicians know that the religion of the country is Catholic ; and it is in direct conflict with merciless, fanatical atheism—an atheism that at the moment adopts Marxist language, just as in earlier generations it used Liberal language, but which antedates either ; the atheism of the impenitent thief at the crucifixion.

This is no place to argue the truth of Christianity. The Catholic believes that in logic and in historical evidence he has grounds for accepting the Church as a society of divine institution, holding a unique commission for her work, privileged on occasions by special revelation, glorified continually by members of supernatural sanctity ; he finds in her doctrine a philosophy which explains his own peculiar position in the order of the universe, a way of life which makes the earth habitable during his existence there and, after that, according to his merits, the hope of Heaven or the fear of Hell. He may or may not be deluded in this belief. But this is what the vast majority of Mexicans mean by religion. They either hate it frenetically, or cherish it above life itself.

It is a faith which, within its structure, allows of measureless diversity and this is a fact which those outside it find difficult to realize ; the spacious wisdom of St. Thomas More, the anxiety about liturgical colours of the convert spinster, the final panic of the gangster calling for the sacraments in the condemned cell, the indignation of the Irish priest contemplating the spread of mixed bathing in his parish, the ingenious proofs of the Parisian æsthete that Rimbaud was at heart a religious poet . . . they are all part of the same thing. The Catholic knows this and others do not, hence the continual, unavailing attempt of the enemies of the Church to represent the religion to which they are opposed as something quite distinct and peculiar to their own part of the world ; unavailing as far as Catholics are concerned, but effective enough among the general, indifferent, mildly well-intentioned, ill-informed people of America and England among whom public opinion is formed. These know their Catholic neighbours to be on the whole reasonable and law-abiding, with certain odd practices on Sundays and an unaccountable aversion to meat on Fridays, crematoriums, contraceptives and so forth ; at elections some Catholics vote conservative and some of them vote labour ; there is nothing at all sinister about them. They know this from their own experience, but when they are told that this same society in other countries is corrupt and oppressive it does not seem improbable. Foreigners are different. Thus they are quite ready to accept official explanations for acts of brutality and injustice which in their own country would inflame them with angry sympathy.

For three generations now, off and on, the enemies of the Church in Mexico have had it their own way at home and abroad. The first question which an intelligent foreigner asks is why, if the Church is what her adherents claim, she should have enemies at all. The answers are as diverse as human nature ; just as there are infinite varieties of goodness, there are varieties of wickedness. The Church makes claims and imposes restrictions which many men find onerous ; she reminds rich men that their possessions are temporary and rulers that there are higher laws than their own. In Mexico, however, in general, anti-clericalism has been based on the single vice of cupidity. The Church was rich and physically defenceless ; robbery had to be justified ; human nature is moved more strongly by guilt than the will to vengeance ; we hate most savagely not those who have wronged us, but those whom we have ourselves wronged.

When it is said, usually with reproach, that the Church in any particular place is rich, there are a number of different things which may be meant and should be distinguished. In Mexico, a hundred years ago, the Church had great possessions accumulated through the centuries by good husbandry, pious bequests and state grants. The figures of her revenue, particularly the diocesan figures, seem formidable and often the reader of popular history is left with the impression that these sums were the personal allowance of the

Bishop ; they were in fact the income out of which not only the whole ecclesiastical organization but what would now be called the ‘ social services ’ of the district were maintained. Under the Spanish system, as in mediæval Europe, education, poor relief, hospitals, orphanages, lunatic asylums were all managed by the Church ; it is always possible, of course, for a bad official to embezzle public funds ; no doubt in the long era of colonial rule there were from time to time Bishops who did this, but when accounts are found by contemporary visitors of the magnificence of some episcopal establishments it should be remembered that it was no uncommon thing for a man of private fortune to enter the Church and live in the same style as his lay kinsmen. Urban Englishmen who denounce the system of tithes by which the Mexican Church was in part supported, seem to forget that the same system is still in force in our own country, where the national church represents a very much smaller proportion of the population than it did in Mexico. When I write my cheque for the tithe on my own few fields for the support of a body of which I am not a member I do so reluctantly, but with no personal animosity against our local rector.

In the time of Juarez and Maximilian it may have seemed arguable that the Church might profit by being disembarrassed of some of her duties ; that government specialists could better administer the great funds that were then in clerical hands. That, in the light of subsequent history, can no longer be maintained. The clergy may have been slipshod and dilatory in some of their methods, but those who robbed her, squandered the booty on private ends and left nothing in her place. Nor, I think, would anyone seriously maintain that the motive of the robbers was a desire to do better ; they simply saw great possessions in the hands of those who could not protect themselves, and they took them ; their sole defence has been to blackguard their victim.

Another thing is also meant by the 'riches of the Church' ; the splendour of the actual churches. Even in their devastated condition they arouse the tourist's wonder and the official guides are quick to point a moral—'all this silver and gold round the altars,' they say, 'while the people wore rags and slept in hovels,' and to those brought up across the border in the austere tradition of the whitewashed meeting-house the contrast is indeed striking. All along the tourist route one heard the same comment, sometimes prompted, more often than not spontaneous. 'Think what it must have cost ! Think what good they could have done to the poor with all that money' ; it is a cry that echoes back to Judas and Mary of Magdala—'To what purpose is this waste ?'—and when I heard it I thought of another incident in my journey in a church that had nothing about it to attract the tourist.

We stopped at the place by chance on the main road between Puebla and the famous [1] tiled church of San Francisco Cholula. It was a drab little village of Indian houses clustering round a shabby, unremarkable church. The presbytery was empty and desolate, for there had not been a parish priest for ten years ; the people were not even sure of a weekly Mass ; a priest rode out when he could from Puebla ; there were dozens of surrounding villages in his charge ; wherever he went there were so many demands on him for christenings and blessings, confessions, marriages, advice, arbitration in disputes—that he could not keep to any time-table. He appeared when he could, a dusty fellow in lay clothes like an impoverished *ranchero* to look at ; when he came he rang the bells and the people stopped what they were doing and flocked in to Mass. When we arrived the men at first pretended that they had lost the key of the church ; they thought we were ' from the government ' and had come to destroy something or take it off to Mexico City. That was all they knew about the government ; that they were well dressed people who arrived unexpectedly in motor-cars to steal something ; (and this was in the most civilized part of the country a few miles out of Puebla). We assured them of our good intentions and at last they gave way ; even then half the male population of the place followed us in to keep an eye on us. The dark little building was full of the rough, highly coloured carving in wood and stone in which the country abounds. It would create a stir in a Bond Street gallery, for it has remarkable qualities of design—but after a few weeks in Mexico one gets used to it. Our genuflections to the altar reassured them a little and they began showing us their possessions, explaining, as had been explained to them, the identities of the various saints and telling us the stories of the biblical events portrayed. Then they showed us with great pride what they themselves were doing, for since the priest went away the building had been in their sole care. They had got hold of a tin of gold paint and were

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[1] Though not to Dr. T. Philip Terry.

'doing the place over'. It was the nastiest kind of gold paint that dries with a dull, powdery surface and rapidly turns green, but they were all poor men and it must have cost them considerable saving. They were dabbing it about everywhere, even on the bells, and were about to start on a pair of fine *estofado* figures. All of them lacked the things which we consider necessaries and they had clubbed together to buy imitation gold paint; æsthetically the result was deplorable; they had ruined the *patina* and rendered their statues quite unsuitable for the drawing-rooms of Cuernavaca. . . . To what purpose was this waste? The answer, quite simply, was carved on the lintel A.D.M.G., to the greater glory of God. The splendid age of trained and directed craftsmanship, of gold leaf, ivory and majolica, was over; it was left for the peasants to preserve the memory of it. For the impulse to adorn is a part of love, and those who see in the glories of Mexican decoration only the self advertisement of a clerical caste and the oppression of a people, do not know love.

In the three hundred years of Spanish rule the churches, particularly those which were centres of pilgrimage, became vast treasuries; every inch of their surface was carved, gilded, jewelled; the furniture and statuary was often of solid silver; an irresistible temptation to the politicians of the new Republic; all this wealth in the hands of a few old canons, mumbling the Office in their great, intricate stalls; all this wealth lying idle, paying no dividends, when the national treasury had been emptied by one gang and their successors had their fortunes to make, quickly, before they too were driven into exile. So the great steal began and with it, inevitably, the campaign of justification, of slander ; and with the guilt and the hate, the wanton destruction ; the libraries thrown out into the gutters, the canvasses slit up, the statues piled up and burned in the plaza, the whole bloody, degenerate business which culminated a year or two ago in the firing squads and the massacres ; the red-shirts lounging over their guns in the early morning sun, waiting in the square for the women to come out of Mass, to fire a volley or two and make off in their lorries . . .

2

'The problem,' says Mr. Gruening, the leading apologist for the revolution, 'has lain and lies in the character of the clergy.' He has collected many pages of matter to support his case, some of it the opinions of secondary authorities but much of it contemporary evidence of a formidable kind. The collection cannot have cost him very great trouble, for there are plenty of people in Mexico eager to supply details. I was taken by an English business man to visit the Dominican church at Tepoztlan. 'Believe it or not,' he said, 'the Jesuits were a fairly decent lot. They were kept in order.'

'I believe it,' I said.

'But the Dominicans ! ' he said. 'Do you know what their favourite little game was ?—solicitation in the confessional. I've read about it myself in *their own records.*'

Mr. Graham Greene [1] met a disappointed American tourist who had just returned from

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[1] *Lawless Roads,* quoted in the previous chapter.

Puebla. '*I went to an agency in San Antonio, Texas,*' he told Mr. Greene. '*They said : " Are you a freemason ?" I said : " Yes." They said : " We got just the thing for you. The hidden convent at Puebla. You'll be met by a freemason. He'll give you the real goods—show you things. The bones of all the nuns' babies." He paused and said with suppressed fury : " There weren't any bones of nuns' babies. It's all propaganda."* '

The guide who hires one a candle-end to visit the underground cells at the monastery of Desierto de los Leones shows one where some water drips from the ceiling, 'This was the water torture. The monks used to tie the Indians under it until they went mad.'

The main staircase of the Presidential Palace in Mexico City has been painted with a huge fresco of a friar embracing a prostitute.

It is all round one, in Mexico, the lubricious snigger about the priesthood, and, of course, there is a nucleus of truth in some of the stories. The nuns at Puebla did not have babies ; the monks at Desierto did not torture the Indians, but my acquaintance at Tepoztlan had certainly unearthed some scandals in the pages of the Dominican trials and there seems good reason to think in the rural districts, remote from effective discipline, a parish priest could sometimes be found living a domestic life as patriarch of a family. Hidalgo declared that chastity was contrary to nature ; Morelos, the other priest of the first revolution, had children ; it was one of the twenty-three charges made against him in 1815 that he had had the eldest of his three sons brought up a Protestant. A catalogue of known delinquents could undoubtedly be compiled which would be profoundly shocking ; a dirty story about a priest is, anywhere, doubly offensive ; but considered objectively, what do all these tales amount to ? In four hundred years, in an enormous country, where strict surveillance was usually impossible ; where the climate in many parts predisposes to indulgence ; where the priesthood occupied a position of unique privilege and authority so that many were attracted to it from laziness and the love of power ; where the position of priest's mistress was considerably more easy than that of the peasant's wife ; where, himself none too well educated, the priest was shut off from educated converse and intellectual interests, it was humanly speaking inevitable that there should be scandals. It is either priggish or malicious to make more of them than this.

But suppose, for the purpose of argument, that in this case the Church's enemies were justified in their denunciations, that the evidence were overwhelming and damning, that it were not possible, as it is, to match every disgrace with a dozen proud achievements, every unworthy priest with a multitude of devoted brothers ; suppose that the Mexican clergy had so deteriorated from their high origins that the bad predominated—What was the remedy ? In her two thousand years the Church has experienced the changes that are evidence of her life ; here seeming to lie fallow, there bursting into sudden flower ; a christian civilization dies in the Eastern Mediterranean, another rises in the forests of the North ; she has her fount of continual renewal. The discipline of Rome is always there to punish her faults ; the religious orders to fertilize her virtues. Again and again in history the process of renewal has been accomplished. Had the critics of the Church wished merely to correct abuses and restore her to health, the means were at hand. Nothing, however, could have been further from their ambitions. Their earliest move, before they dared strike at the parochial clergy was to cut the people off from the life of the Church by suppressing the religious orders with their international organization, and to forbid papal delegates and foreign clergy of any kind from taking part in a restoration of order. They sought to reduce the clergy to the condition in which they depicted them.

It is the character of the Church that, left undisturbed in her work, she becomes the trustee for great benefactions and also the possessor of splendid works of art. To say that the Church in any place is rich, means primarily that she has been loved and trusted. To her enemies, however, her wealth represents money wrung from a cowed and superstitious people and they are often able to quote examples from personal observation which seem to support this view. It is unedifying but not uncommon in peasant communities to find the parish priest wrangling with his parishioners for the price of his services. Many travellers, particularly in Mexico, Catholics as well as non-Catholics, have been shocked to see, for example, a woman of the poorest class, baby in arms, pleading with an obdurate priest for a remission in the price of its baptism ; they have turned from this spectacle to the relics of ecclesiastical grandeur about them and argued plausibly that it was by such hard bargaining as this that the great churches were adorned. In fact, however, the argument depends on a reversal of historical sequence. Where the church is richly endowed, it is the poorest that profit, not only in the various charitable institutes which it supports, but by the services of the priests who, adequately supported, can afford to be generous. The people come to look upon their priest as the source rather than the recipient of bounty. When the endowments of the Church are confiscated the priest is obliged to rely on direct payment for his services. The peasant likes to give, but he also likes to bargain ; the priest, drawn from the same stock, has similar tastes. Hence these heated arguments, both sides pleading poverty with equal justice, which are so strange to visitors who are familiar only with Anglican parish life. Hence, also, on occasions an antagonism between priest and people based not on any dispute of the value of the services offered, but of their price. The woman wants to get her child baptized and she wants to get it done as cheaply as possible ; if she knows that a neighbour has been given a special price nothing will induce her to pay more.[1] There have been cases when villagers have driven out an unpopular priest, usually on the charge of avarice, and in general it may be said that the Indian's devotion, which in recent years has found expression in so many unplanned, unled, disastrous risings against the government's policy, has been centred on the tangible fabric of his parish church, on his God, Our Lady and the saints, and the basic facts of his creed, rather than personal allegiance to his parish priest.

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[1] Among negro Christians in the West Indies the satisfactory solution has been found of grading funerals, marriages etc. as first, second and third class, according to the length and gaiety of the service. Thus the essential rites are made accessible to the poorest, while the negro's natural love of display ensures the priest a tolerable income from those who can afford it. The Mexican Indians have little of the competitive spirit on which this system depends for its success.

When, however, stories are being related of the unworthiness of the Mexican clergy, there is one, of very recent date, that should always be remembered. A few years ago, when the persecution was at its bloodiest and the resistance to it was becoming increasingly formidable, Calles thought of a solution ; it was not a new one ; it had worked very well in very similar circumstances in Tudor England ; he proposed to found a National Church ; buildings should be opened to it, protection and financial support guaranteed ; all that the priests had to do was to resign their allegiance to the Pope and transfer it to Calles and, as a guarantee of their good faith, to marry. The alternatives were official favour and advancement and a comfortable domestic life on the one hand ; persecution to the death on the other. Hostile propaganda had made the Mexican clergy notorious all over the world ; they were said to care only for women and money ; in many parts of the world their brothers had found it embarrassing to defend them, had decided to shelve them with the Renaissance Popes, as one of the inexplicable shady parts of history, like the rubbish heaps one sometimes finds, pushed out of sight in odd corners of cathedrals. And yet in that whole maligned society only three old reprobates could be found to accept Calles's offer. One of them is said to be at his job still, at the altar of an empty church somewhere in Mexico City ; no one seemed to know exactly where.

3

But, say Mr. Gruening and his readers, the Indian is not really Christian. He may be willing to die for his religion but it is not the religion of Notre Dame and Fordham ; it is a hotch-potch of polytheism and black magic ; with the foreign tongue which the missionary taught him he pays lip service to the Spanish God but in his heart he still worships the old, bloody gods of the Aztecs. Europeans and Americans who attempt to stir up sympathy for him are merely seeking to perpetuate a form of degraded paganism.

It is a disingenuous argument for its ultimate aim is to discredit not the Indians' religion, but everybody's ; it is the familiar thesis of the professors of ' comparative religion ' all over the world ; that man's disposition to worship comes from his awe of natural forces and from his own dreams ; that there has been no special revelation but a cycle of myths, finding new names in the different stages of man's progress to rational atheism ; just as churches were built on the ruins of temples, pagan statues christened and given the names of the saints, and the holidays of the Church synchronized with the pagan calendar, so her sacraments are merely the liturgy of the old mystery-cults. Most knowledgeable Christians have considered this case at one time or another and, if they have remained Christians, have rejected it, but it is an arguable case and this is not the place to attempt its refutation. What is *not* arguable is Mr. Gruening's case ; that Christianity is true for the American and the European but untrue for the Indian. The christian believes that the particular historical events from which he takes his chronology—the birth, life and death of Christ which he calls the Incarnation and the Atonement—meant the expression in humanly intelligible form of truths beyond his comprehension ; he knows that the society which then arose, which he calls the Church, owes its form to a variety of human influences—to Greek speculative philosophy, Jewish poetry and theology, Roman political organization and so on—all of which have left their plain imprint on its history and character. He knows that in the centuries before the Incarnation, human organizations and discoveries were converging on this particular point of time.

In just this way, before the coming of the Spanish missionaries, the inhabitants of Mexico were approaching similar ideas. They had, for instance, the conception of sacrifice in a highly developed but monstrous form. For the mass butchery of the Aztec temples the missionaries substituted the conception of a single, unique human sacrifice, daily consummated on the new altars. They found, too, habits of devotion curiously analogous to those they sought to introduce ; the old priests employed holy water and incense in their ceremonial, they heard general confessions of sin and dispensed absolution, they taught the existence of a future life divided into heaven, hell and limbo. Some of the simpler missionaries were disconcerted by these resemblances and attributed them to the devil, but they made the new teaching readily acceptable, and the Church followed the policy traditional to her, of accepting all that was assimilable in the existing order ; the new churches were built, just as they had been in Europe, on the sites of the old temples. Sometimes the old idols were found among the new statues. Mr. Gruening found one still standing in a monastic cloister, still honoured by the presence of a few flowers ; there, he says, is the proof that the Indians merely follow their old gods with a new name. But there is another explanation ; he is on common ground with many a zealous friar in neglecting it ; it is simply another way of regarding the same facts. Before they had heard the story of Jesus and Mary, the Indians worshipped them under other names ; in the long memory of the race there is still room for gratitude for the blessings they received in those dark ages and they cherish those earlier, confused intimations of truth as the mother of a family may still cherish the dolls she nursed in her childhood.

The love of statues and holy places plays an enormous part in the Indian's religion, and the great shrine of Guadalupe is, certainly, far more important to him than St. Peter's in Rome. It is the Indian Virgin as distinct from the little Spanish Virgin of Los Remedios, and Mr. Gruening is able to make great fun, as many have done before him, of the competitive nature of the various popular devotions of the country. It is easy to say that since God is everywhere, there is no reason why any particular place should be more holy than any other ; that since all statues and pictures are most inadequate symbols of what they represent, that none should excite special reverence ; it is easy, for that matter, to say that there was no reason why God should become man ; it is on that central theme that all christianity depends—word becoming tangible flesh—and those who accept its illimitable implications believe that it is only in material symbols that man is capable of recognizing the truth by which he lives, and that, because of his own material nature, he has been allowed occasional glimpses of divinity in material form. One of these is the miraculous picture of Guadalupe.

Its history and its presence in Mexico cannot be treated merely as a pretty piece of folk-lore. Mexico abounds in picturesque legends of one kind and another, but the Guadalupe stands entirely apart. It is for all the Indians and for great numbers of whites and mestizos the main focus for their hopes and aspirations.

The story is notable as having no pre-christian Mexican parallel[1]; the account of its origin is as precise as that of Lourdes. It has been told countless times but never better than in its first, contemporary form. One may well be cautious of saying that any narrative has the ‘ mark of truth ’ about it, but the author of the Diego story was either relating what he believed, or else was an extremely accomplished fraud. It is this : On December 9th, 1531, ten years and four months after the conquest, an Indian peasant, fifty-eight years old, was on his way by foot to the mission church of Tlaltelolco, to hear mass and attend a class in the religion in which he had been christened a few years earlier under the name of Juan Diego. No outstanding sanctity was at the time imputed to him. After the event he became a guardian in the new shrine and died a holy death at the age of 70. He was typical of the thousands of Indians who had accepted the conquerors' religion after a minimum of instruction ; accepted it, presumably, in a kind of bemused resignation as part of the many foreign introductions that had suddenly revolutionized his world.

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[1] Sahagun, a generation later, states that a temple existed on the site of Guadalupe, dedicated to the Indian maternity goddess. He was a zealous scholar and schoolmaster working in the neighbourhood at Tlaltelolco. No mention, contemporary with Diego, is found of the temple. It is reasonable to suppose that the friars of Tlaltelolco had already destroyed it, before the apparition. It would be a suitable place for the new church to arise among the ruins of the old. ‘ *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you* ’, has been the text of the missionary church since the time of Paul.

Following the track across the desolate area where the town of Guadalupe now stands, passing, it is likely, the ruins where in youth he had paid homage to the native mother-goddess, he suddenly saw the place transfused with unfamiliar light and colour ; there was the sound of music and, on a rock above him, he saw a woman, a fellow Indian in colour and type, who called him to her, addressed him as her son, told him that she was Mary and that she wished a church to be built on the spot where she was standing. He was to tell this to the Bishop.

He was received with the scepticism that such tales usually arouse in the higher clergy, and sent away. He returned to the spot ; The Lady was waiting for him ; he pointed out that it was no good sending him on a mission of this kind ; why did she not send a Spaniard or someone of importance? She told him to go back with the same message. He went. On this second visit Diego aroused the interest if not the sympathy of the Bishop ; perhaps this was a case of witchcraft of the kind which the Church was endeavouring to stamp out. He told him to bring some sign with him and sent two men to follow him and see what happened. Next day, the 10th, these men reported that Diego, when he reached the rocks where he claimed to have seen the apparition, mysteriously disappeared from view. Unaware of this himself, he received orders to return next day and receive his sign.

Then in Diego's slow, peasant mind suspicions began to arise. He was getting mixed up in affairs that were beyond his capacity. Besides his uncle was ill. He did not return. On the 12th, however, his uncle was worse and wanted a priest ; that meant going to Tlaltelolco again. Diego did not like it and chose a circuitous path. But The Lady was there, too, blocking his way. He told her about his uncle being ill. She knew all about it ; he would get well, she said ; Diego had another duty to perform. He must take his sign to the Bishop. Above where they stood the rocks rose in a sharp, barren hill ; The Lady told him to climb there and pick roses. It was an improbable place but Diego found them, miraculously blooming among the stones ; enough to fill his *sarape.* So he trudged off again, back to the suspicious Bishop and spilt the flowers at his feet. He may have thought, on the road, that it was not much of a sign ; after all, there was only his word for it that they came from the desert. But he did as he was told and revealed not only the roses but a picture of his lady, Our Lady, imprinted on the *sarape.* That is the picture which now hangs over the high altar at Guadalupe.

The Church was begun immediately on the site which Diego showed. In 1532 the picture was solemnly conveyed there. It had already created a sensation ; a disagreeable one to the many Spaniards who regarded the Indians as animals. There had already been some distrust of the policy of baptizing the Indians, giving them the idea that they, too, had souls equal before God with their conquerors. And now Our Lady had appeared to an Indian, more than this she had appeared *as* an Indian ; and here, for all time, was the evidence ; a Virgin with an Indian face ; a thing no painter would have dared do without incurring the charge of blasphemy. And the Spaniards accepted the miracle. The important feature is not the repugnance it aroused but the fact that the repugnance was overcome. The nobility of the country, from the Viceroy down, solemnly prostrated themselves in the new shrine and from that day until now every christian ruler of Mexico, even Maximilian, has made his homage there to the fact which it had needed a supernatural revelation to enforce, that the religion of the Spaniard was equally the religion of the Indian.

The shrine has never been closed or pillaged, though the neighbouring convent suffered with the rest of the country. At the height of the Calles persecution the Indians guarded it day and night. A bomb was placed under the altar—the cross may be seen as it was twisted by the explosion—but the picture was undamaged. For the time a reproduction was substituted but now the original is back in its place. While I was there the church was being repaired and redecorated ; it is always full of worshippers.

Mr. T. Philip Terry, whose *Guide to Mexico* has been mentioned elsewhere in these pages, provides the tourist with the kind of comment which the present government encourages. '*One cannot but admire,*' he says, '*the positive genius of Zumarraga* (the Bishop) *in planning that the Virgin appear in Mexico not as a carved figure, nor yet in the likeness of a Spanish woman, but rather in the guise of an Indian princess with some resemblance to the revered goddess*

Tonantzin thus striking the Indian population at the most vulnerable point . . . the picture is perhaps of Spanish origin . . . The fact that the apparition occurred during the incumbency of the Bishop Zumarraga, the bigot . . . is significant . . . It is believed that the Indians regard the image of the Virgin as a divine manifestation of their primitive goddess. . . On the feast day *the unhygienic and ignorant Indians overrun the village to such an extent that the problem of preventing pestilence is a serious one to the authorities. The church is usually packed to suffocation : the devotees bring habits and an entomological congress as varied as they are astonishing, all the church decorations within reach are kissed to a high polish and thoroughly fumigated later, and all breathe freer when the frenzied shriners have returned to their different homes. Many of the pilgrims are wretchedly poor and to maintain themselves on the journey—which not a few make on foot—they bring curious home-made knick-knacks . . . A careful scrutiny of the church is difficult on Sundays . . . At these times it presents a very animated and democratic appearance. Well dressed Mexicans, foreigners, ragged Indians, crying babies . . . are prominent features. Less visible but just as prominent, in a way, are the agile specimens of the* genus pulex *which the visitor to this sanctuary usually carries away with him.'*

These smug and facetious passages are an exact expression of the wrong-thinking which the miracle of Guadalupe rebukes. Mr. Terry starts with an assumption which stultifies all his subsequent observations, that a miracle is of necessity a fraud . . . ' the positive genius of Zumarraga in planning.' The value of miracles anywhere is not in the direct benefits they confer—a single cripple among millions enabled to walk, one hungry man among millions given a single meal—but in their manifesting the nearness of the supernatural. But most miracles also show an immediate and local purpose. The apparition of Lourdes came at the height of French scepticism ; at Guadalupe it came to teach the Spaniards that the Indians were men and women and souls, to teach the Indians that the Spaniards' god was the god of all humankind. Mr. Terry by his primary incredulity finds himself led into denying these beliefs in order to discredit the revelation that supports them. For what is his argument? The Indians are a dirty lot, they are crawling with fleas, the place has to be fumigated after they have gone, they have no business at Guadalupe at all, everyone 'breathes the freer' when they go, they come on foot with 'curious knick-knacks', a pestilential mob with whom no tourist cares to rub shoulders, *animals* . . . And, since they are like this, it is absurd to pretend that they are worshipping the same God as well-fed, expensively educated Americans and Europeans ; 'it is believed' they regard the Virgin as 'their primitive goddess'. She has 'some resemblance to the revered Tonantzin'. The innocent reader might imagine that Mr. Terry had made an iconographical study, had found an image of Tonantzin and compared it with the Virgin of Guadalupe ; what he has really done is to read page 236 of Gruening, and what Gruening has done is to quote what Father Sahagun wrote fifty years after the time of Zumarraga, that the Indians when going to Guadalupe said, and, I believe still say, 'Let us go to the festival of Tonantzin' ; and what does this sinister word Tonantzin mean? It is simply the Indian word for ' Our Mother '. What more fitting epithet could be found for the Virgin than this, once unworthily applied to a member of the old pantheon? But the Indian is a subhuman creature; if he once thought a heathen goddess was his mother, he does still; he cannot have learned very much, otherwise he would be rich and clean. This is the basis of the criticism.

The Christian point of view is to admit that miracles are possible but exceedingly rare, and to examine each on its evidence. The Guadalupe stands the test well. Hostile critics have usually weakened their case by preliminary abuse of Archbishop Zumarraga. At the time of the conquest quantities of Aztec painted manuscripts[1] disappeared, which would have been of enormous interest to subsequent historians. Zumarraga is charged with their destruction. The authority for his responsibility is the utterance of an eccentric friar named Mier, (who in 1817 disguised himself as a Bishop and landed at Soto la Marina with a small revolutionary force under Francisco Javier Mina which was dispersed after a short guerilla campaign). From him the tale has been copied from book to book, even those published since Francis Clement Kelly's exposure, until it is generally accepted. The Indian historian Ixtlilxochitl of the seventeenth century mentions the destruction but attributes it, inconsistently, both to missionaries and to the Tlaxcalans who sacked Tezcoco eight years before Zumarraga landed in Mexico. The only certain association of Zumarraga with Aztec manuscripts is that he made a collection of all that had survived and took them to Europe in 1532, where they are now preserved in various libraries. As for the missionaries in general, by giving the Indians the alphabet they made it possible for them to record their oral traditions. Hundreds of volumes of this kind were kept in the monastic libraries until the Liberal revolutions of 1855 and 1861, when they were sold as waste paper.

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[1] The Aztecs as has been mentioned before had no alphabet or real written language, but a well developed system of hieroglyphic record.

Zumarraga was outstanding in a generation of devoted missionaries for his zeal in educating, evangelizing and humanizing the Indians. It was he who petitioned the King against their enslavement, smuggling his message out of the country in a hollow image. 'If it is true,' he wrote, 'that your Majesty has granted permission' for the process of enslavement, 'you should out of reverence to God, do humble penitence for it.' It was he who founded the first school for higher education of Indians, Santa Cruz in Tlaltelolco, who started the education of women there, introduced the first printing press and laid the foundations of the great educational and charitable system which only came to an end in the revolutions. While others were making their fortunes, the Archbishop died in debt. His ambition was to see a new province of Christendom, in its widest application, rising beyond the Atlantic. He was one to whom the special revelation to the Indians would be intensely welcome. Those who lack strong moral feelings themselves, are ever ready to credit their moral superiors with a disposition to do evil that good may come of it. Earnestly as Zumarraga may have prayed for a sign from Heaven, warmly as we know he accepted it, it is scarcely conceivable that his stern conscience would have bent to a fraud of the kind with which Mr. Terry credits him ; but even were one to accept this psychological improbability, there are many difficulties to explain.

The ground of the picture is certainly an Indian *sarape* of the normal coarse weave with its central seam clearly visible from the sanctuary rails. This, and the native character of the model make it highly unlikely to have been imported ready made from Europe. It is stretching the imagination too far to conceive of the whole matter being plotted and prepared in Madrid, yet the painters who visited Mexico in the earlier colonial days are well known and none of them did work remotely resembling the Virgin of Guadalupe. Moreover no one has been able to identify the material with which it is painted ; it is not oil, water nor tempera colour of any recognizable kind. In 1756 the best known of Mexican painters, Miguel Cabrera, published the report of a careful technical examination in which he professed himself quite unable to explain the process by which it was made ; on two other occasions committees of painters have been allowed to take it out of its glass and have been able to give no explanation. Nothing would suit the present government better than to be able to expose the thing as a priestly fraud, but they have been obliged to keep silent.

And yet, it must be admitted, the picture is very like a human composition ; the folds and pattern of the robe, the rays of glory, the crescent moon at the feet, the cherub below, are all curiously stylized. One cannot imagine a painter sitting down to design the holy shroud of Turin, but one *can* imagine him drawing the Virgin of Guadalupe. Looking at it I wondered whether perhaps some human agency had not intervened to preserve and ornament the true image which Diego and Zumarraga saw. The bodies of saints exposed for veneration are often so overlaid with wax that the surface is nowhere the actual skin of the body ; there is no fraud ; the body is there but the preservative hides it ; I wondered whether this might not be the case with Guadalupe ; it was a purely personal doubt and it seemed to leave more unexplained than the frank acceptance of the miracle ; it did not explain the actual pigmentation of the material ; if one can accept a God who treats with human beings in a way they will understand, one can accept the miraculous appearance of a picture ; it is neither more nor less credible for having some of the marks of a human composition.

Anyway, the appearance, or, as the guide-books prefer it, the alleged appearance of Our Lady at Guadalupe is one of the important features of Mexican history ; to the great majority of Mexicans it is something far more real and personally significant than the coming of Cortes, and anyone who treats of Mexico without considering it, is necessarily superficial. Reproductions of the picture are everywhere ; even in the homes of the most sceptical foreign business men. There was an enormous output of replicas, some of them by the greatest painters of the country, and today picture postcards and medals are sold in millions. But it is to the shrine itself that the people flock. There is an air of gaiety surrounding the village, a perpetual fair day. The path which Diego climbed to pick the roses is lined with photographers' booths and Indians who have tramped for weeks to make the pilgrimage may, by sticking their heads through a canvas screen, take home as a souvenir the picture of themselves sailing over the shrine in an aeroplane. It is, however, not only Indians who come to Guadalupe ; it is, as Mr. Terry remarks with apparent distaste, very ' democratic '. You see people of all nations there, as you do at any place of pilgrimage. (A great deal of nonsense is talked and repeated about the partisan loyalties of the various shrines. One is told for example that Our Lady of the Remedies is ' the Spanish Virgin '. I went to Los Remedios on the morning of the feast ; in the crowd that queued up to kiss the little statue which a soldier of Cortes's had brought with him in his saddle bag, we were the only whites.)

There are votive offerings at Guadalupe, but fewer than in most places of pilgrimage in Mexico or elsewhere. In Mexico they take a form which as far as I know is unique. They are little paintings on tin portraying the danger from which the pilgrim has been preserved—accidents with horses and motor-cars and trams, attacks by bandits and soldiers, fires—all graphically represented. Most towns have an artist or two who specialize in this work and will do you a disaster for a peso or so. The Ministry of Fine Arts has collected some from the shrines where they belong and added them as a humorous contribution to the furniture at Churibusco. But there were not many at Guadalupe for it is not principally frequented with a view to particular benefits. Mexicans go there several times in their lives ; before journeys abroad and on great occasions as a kind of dedication, but more often I think as an act of pure worship—and for reassurance. As long as the Virgin is there over her altar, however desperate things may seem, there is still hope. If she deserts them, then they are back again, helpless, on the reeking altars of Huitzilopochtli. They believe that it was at Guadalupe that Mexico became a nation and that Our Lady took them in her keeping ; she is still there guarding them ; and they have to come from time to time to make sure.

For myself, at any rate, the great twilit Cathedral was the most impressive sight in Mexico ; it was much the same at all hours of the day and on all days of the week ; sometimes it was fuller, but there was always the same atmosphere of hushed veneration ; there were workmen high overhead on scaffolding, hammering at the roof, but it made no difference. It was the one place in Mexico that never seemed noisy. People of every conceivable kind were always there, praying. There were family groups of all ages, candles in hand, working their way up the aisle on their knees. There were men who remained apparently interminably on their knees with their arms stretched out on either side of them ; they were like that when one came in and still there, in the same position, when one left ; rapt, their lips moving, their eyes open fixed on the picture. There were women who, in spite of their shabby civil costume, one knew to be nuns, and swarthy, inconspicuous men dressed like small shopkeepers who, to one's surprise, one found to be priests. There were mothers guiding their children in the sign of the cross. All the limitless variety of the Church seemed to be represented there. No doubt there were also

' members of the *genus pulex* ' but it did not seem the least important.

In their way, of course, the Mexicans are superstitious ; it is a legacy of the dark origins of the human race that is found in every country ; it is only an unfamiliar superstition that seems to us shocking. There, as everywhere, it is the concern of the clergy to distinguish and drive out the harmful superstitions ; many of them are innocent enough. The priest of a large parish in Oaxaca was showing me his church ; one of the statues had a coin inserted between its painted teeth. The priest sighed resignedly. ' They will do it,' he said. ' I am always trying to stop it.' It was the statue of an early christian martyr who had had his tongue torn out and who, as a somewhat remote consequence, was credited locally with particular powers against scandal-mongers ; when anyone in Oaxaca finds there are rumours going round about him, he puts a coin in the saint's mouth. Sometimes, if no one has noticed it and the gossip seems to have abated, he comes and takes it away again and feels the kind of satisfaction people get after completing a railway journey without a ticket. Customs of this kind are prevalent ; Mexicans, like Europeans, resort to special shrines for particular benefits. It is common to hear a certain type of foreigner—Catholic as well as agnostic—say that the saints are more important to the Mexicans than their God ; that they still worship a host of deities. The routine of their daily life gives some colour to this misapprehension, just as a stranger might believe that the film-stars and athletes who form so large a part of ordinary English conversation were the real heroes and leaders about whom our national life revolved. The test came a few years ago in the peasants' revolt against Calles, when all over the country people rose in defence of their churches and were massacred by the federal troops. They were fighting for essentials then and they called themselves 'Cristeros'; *Viva Cristo Rey* was the rallying cry of that gallant and disastrous campaign.

Of course by no means all the Cristeros were pious crusaders. There is always present in Mexico a considerable semi-bandit population who will join in any disturbance; there were cases when these usurped the badges and banners of the Cristeros and committed outrages which Gruening has carefully catalogued. Even Gruening, however, is bound to admit that the suppression of religion in Mexico has throughout been the work of a hated minority. It is notable, too, that nearly every amelioration of it has resulted from violent popular protest.

The story of the persecution has often been told but has received curiously little attention in Europe. Aspects of it have been noted from time to time in these pages. It began simply as an act of robbery, with the accompanying campaign of justification by agnostic teaching and the vilification of the clergy. Throughout the nineteenth century the Masonic Lodges remained centres of an anti-religious party which ensured for itself influential positions in every department of the state. The old-fashioned Liberal-Mason-Agnostics, however, tolerated the priests as a harmless source of comfort to their women and their peasants, sent their daughters to school in convents abroad, and even called for a priest themselves on their death beds. It was only after the fall of Diaz that the movement became militantly atheist ; it was then a definitely communist, proletarian revolutionary body under the same international auspices which caused the Leninist revolution in Russia and the brief and bloody regime of Bela Khun in Hungary. In a decade of civil war and anarchy, with rival generals everywhere proclaiming themselves the government, the communist organization, soon to be known as the CROM, represented a single, consistent policy and achieved an importance quite out of proportion to its numbers. It became the virtual master of each successive President and the price of its support, always, was the extinction of the Church.

Its influence may be shown on the change of Carranza's and Obregon's policy between 1915 and 1917. In the former year they both declared for religious liberty for all Mexican citizens. In the latter Carranza assembled his supporters at Queretaro and formulated the decree on which all the subsequent troubles have been based. The decree is now dignified by the name of the ' Constitution ', but the convention which discussed it was nothing more than Carranza's faction. This ' Constitution ' began on a sinister note by reversing the normal logic of politics ; instead of deriving the powers of the constitution from the will of the people, it derived the rights of the people from the constitution, defining certain elementary rights which Carranza's party were disposed to ' grant '. No attempt has ever been made to ratify this camp pronouncement by popular vote.

Like the Labour Laws, the Constitution of Queretaro must be read in the knowledge that subsequent rulings would resolve all ambiguities in the most drastic terms which they were capable of bearing, but even in their simplest form the provisions represent a legal condition for the Church which has no parallel in any country except Russia. They declare education to be totalitarian and forbid religious corporations or ministers from establishing or directing primary schools ; any school erected for the purpose of religious teaching is confiscated ; ministers of religion may not maintain institutions for scientific research ; religious orders of every kind are proscribed ; '*the Law recognizes no juridical personality in the religious institutions known as churches*' ; i.e. they are deprived of all legal rights of appeal to Congress or protection by the courts ; no one of foreign birth may be a priest in Mexico ; any Mexican becoming a priest loses his rights of citizenship, his vote and his right to hold office ; '*ministers of religious creeds are incapable legally of inheriting by will from ministers of the same religious creed or from any private individual to whom they are not related by blood within the fourth degree*' ; '*no trial by jury shall ever be granted for the infraction of any of the preceding provisions*' ; no hospital or poor-house may be under the patronage, administration or supervision of a religious corporation.

There are other provisions of a similar nature, all of which would be intolerable in America or England, but it was some time before matters came to a crisis. At first it was uncertain how long the Calles-Obregon-Carranza alliance would last or who would succeed it ; it was also uncertain what force and interpretation would be given to the new constitution. There had been hard laws on the statute book in the time of Diaz, but they had not been enforced and the Church had been able to carry on her work in comparative peace. It was nine years before it became clear that the urban communist party was growing in influence and that the Calles-Obregon government had decided to stave off its economic demands by satisfying its hatred of the Church. The Mexican Bishops then attempted to exert their influence by peaceful and topical means in declaring what amounted to a strike ; Calles replied by instituting a regime which made no pretence of any other motive than the total and immediate extermination of Christianity in his country. He was of Syrian extraction, without share in the high traditions of Mexico ; today he is an affluent exile in California. There is nothing remarkable about him and he would have gone down to history as a purely local figure, one of a succession of negligible names, the riff-raff of party intrigue and violence that gets to the top in times of disorder, had it not been for this campaign of his. It was not even his ; he was merely an instrument, allowed to pile up his private gains so long as he followed the policy ordained for him. When he became reluctant to continue he was sent away. But the few years of his regime will always be known by his name and he will be famous, until the end of the world, as the man who murdered Father Pro.

There were hundreds of others done to death at the same time. Mexico had been infertile of religious heroes for some generations ; now she suddenly burst into flower ; but popular imagination always seeks to personify its ideals, and it is on

Pro, very worthily, that it has fastened as the embodiment of the spirit Calles provoked. Within a few hours of his death he was already canonized in the hearts of the people ; with typical ineptitude Calles had photographers on the scene of the execution and issued pictures of it to the press ; within a day or two it was a criminal offence to possess one ; they circulated nevertheless from hand to hand and were reproduced in secret all over the country. Today you can buy cards of Pro outside the churches and even government apologists have stopped trying to justify his death. It was a mistake, they admit ; it was indeed ; one of those resounding mistakes which make history. While Dwight Morrow and his clown and Calles were off on a trip together in the Presidential train talking of debt settlements, Pro was being shot in a back yard. Dwight Morrow is already forgotten. Pro is the inspiration of thousands through whom the Mexican Church is still alive.

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The present situation of the Church in Mexico is the result of the truce effected with the mediation of Dwight Morrow. Mexican Catholics profess small gratitude to him for his intervention. The promises then made by the government have not been kept. The Cristeros were induced to surrender their arms under an amnesty which has been broken by a series of retributive murders. The hierarchy believed that their spiritual work was to be allowed to continue without persecution ; they have been bitterly disappointed. For Catholics the unhappy character of the compromise has been emphasized by the grave warning of the late Pope in the encyclical *Firmissimam Constantiam* of Easter 1937. For English radicals the situation was explained in an article in *New Statesman* of February 12th, 1938. 'Although the power of the Church's hierarchy has been broken, freedom of worship continues to exist unhampered in Mexico.'

It is true that for the incurious tourist conditions in the districts he frequents may seem more or less normal. They find a number of churches put to civil uses as garages, libraries, warehouses, fire-stations ; 'There were too many of them,' the guides explain, and to one surveying the 365 churches [1] that surround the little village of Cholula, the excuse sounds plausible. The churches that are open are perpetually crowded ; priests are at the altars and in the confessionals, apparently undisturbed.

Landing at Vera Cruz, with an afternoon to wait before the train left for Mexico City, I set out to look at the town. I had read of Vera Cruz as a state where the government were particularly anti-religious and expected to find its churches shut. The first I entered had been converted into a public library. It is a curious thing, but churches never seem suitable for any other purpose than the one for which they were built. I have seen secularized churches in many parts of the world being used as museums, mosques, billiard saloons, drawing-rooms—they never looked right. The library at Vera Cruz was damp and stuffy ; two or three children of high-school age were doing their lessons there ; a few others were lounging over the picture papers. It had a depressing air, but so have most public libraries anywhere in the world. The other church was open and very busy ; the decorations were shoddy and shabby ; plaster statues had taken the place of the rich colonial sculpture, but at every altar there were people making their devotions, not old women only but quite young men, and in the nave a young catechist was giving instruction to a large class of schoolchildren. They were learning the responses of the Mass, repeating them in unison. It looked as though the compromise were working quite well. The Church was being allowed to compete with the State on equal terms for support of the new generation. Seeing it the Catholic tourist might be tempted to think that the religious press in his own country was making an unnecessary fuss.

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[1] This prodigality is exceptional, but is always quoted as the example of clerical superfluity. The churches were built in conformity with missionary custom on the sites of existing shrines.

Vera Cruz, as a matter of fact, is a place where the Church had recently won a considerable victory. A year before every church in the State was shut as they had been in the time of Calles. Dwight Morrow's bonhomie had had no effect there. The Bishop had been forbidden to enter his diocese ; a few gallant priests moved in disguise from house to house saying Mass in secret. Then an incident had occurred which suddenly aroused the patient people ; it was typical of what had been going on all over the country for more than ten years. Those responsible for it had no reason to expect any trouble. They did no more than murder a little girl, as had often been done before, but for some reason the people who had suffered so much in dumb resentment suddenly asserted themselves.

The child had been to one of the houses in Orizaba where the police rightly believed Mass was being said ; she came out alone, in the early morning, straight from her communion ; she was not of those for whom the *New Statesman* would have us believe ' freedom of worship continued unhampered ' ; the police followed her ; she took fright and began to run. They shot her down in the street and returned to their quarters for their usual torpid Orizaba Sunday. But it proved different from other Sundays. News of the murder spread in the town, which was full of peasants in for the day. Suddenly they rose, broke open the doors of their church, barricaded themselves there and began ringing the bells. The C.T.M. bosses telegraphed helplessly to Mexico for advice. All over the State news spread of what had happened in Orizaba. Everywhere the churches were re-occupied. General Cardenas was just completing his plans for the confiscation of the oil properties ; he dared not risk another Cristero rising. The local governor was made to give way. The Bishop returned ; the priests came out of hiding, and the people flocked back to their churches.

It is by means such as these, not by the exchange of cigars in the Presidential train, that the Church is being re-established in Mexico. A European is tempted to write ' Faith ' instead of Church. I had, indeed, done so and struck it out, for the Faith has never been lost to the vast majority of the country. But the Faith cannot exist for ever without its tangible expression ; it is not a mere system of philosophic propositions and historical facts ; though it may sometimes appear as this, in certain intellectual types living in a sympathetic atmosphere. It is a habit of life and a social organization. The simpler a people, the ruder their living conditions and the more limited their information, so much the more do they need to symbolize their ideas in concrete shapes. They must have buildings in which they consort for worship, statues and pictures to make the ideas of their creed intelligible and memorable ; above all they—equally with the most arid theologian—must have the sacraments. The communist may logically maintain that these things are futile and mischievous ; tricks invented by his enemies to delude man from his real duty in life, which is to get through the largest possible amount of consumable goods and to produce those goods in the largest possible quantities so that he may consume them. Isolate a people absolutely from tainted contacts ; obliterate every monument to the old delusions ; exterminate those who remember the old order with regret ; educate the children in ignorance of its principles ; then, humanly speaking, you will produce a race of atheists, or at any rate of non-Christians. Curious ideas will no doubt take shape in their empty minds, but it is not conceivable that a race, theologically sterilized in this way, will evolve for itself the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. This was the thesis of the communist gang behind Calles ; it is reasonable enough, by purely human standards. What is not reasonable is the attitude of the extreme Nazis and the present Mexican apologists—who have to be double faced in their apologies, to their too zealous international friends on one side, and the too curious humanitarians on the other—that religion is a purely private business ; that if a man is disposed that way he can sit at home and be religious by himself; that he needs no special class to minister to him, no special association with sympathizers, no place to associate and no means of conveying his belief to his descendants. Either his religion will die or it will find concrete expression in these ways.

The Church for her life, has to have a priesthood, an order of men peculiarly educated and consecrated for a specific work ; she has to have property where she can preserve her sacred things from outrage; she has to have the opportunity of conveying her teaching to children whose parents desire it. Deny her these elementary claims and you deny her life. Each one of these is still being denied in Mexico.

General Cardenas, himself, seems slightly fuddled on the subject of religion. He is not, of course, a practising Catholic; his party would not leave him in office a day if he were, but there are signs that, in his own classic phrase, he has begun to 'weary of the social struggle '. 'I am tired,' he said, 'of closing churches and finding them full.' He is a man who has spent most of his life in barracks in the masonic-agnostic atmosphere of the revolutionary army; in childhood he worked in a printing office but entered government service at adolescence ; 1913 found him as a gaoler with a single prisoner ; he let the man out and together they joined the revolution ; since then he has probably never come into contact with anything that can be called Christian life ; at the age of 25 he was a general, an ally of Calles and Obregon. He was taught that the Church was invented for their profit by priests and *hacendados ;* the priests and *hacendados* have gone, and it seems to come as a genuine surprise to him each time that a popular disturbance brings it to his notice that the people still value their faith. His habit has been—as in the incident at Orizaba quoted above—to give way. He is more interested in pleasing the people than in following any logical policy ; but, relying as he does for his position and safety upon the C.T.M., he dare not alter the laws ; nor can he, until they are brought forcibly to his notice, take any steps to see that the laws are not exceeded. While I was there two State governments, those of Tabasco and Chiapas, still refused even the meagre freedom that the law prescribed. In Tabasco, the churches were still all shut—those, that is to say, that had not been demolished. The late Governor Garrido had got into trouble for carrying his anti-religious zeal too far ; he had sent squads of gunmen far beyond the boundaries of his State to shoot up churchgoers near the tourist zone ; that had been too much and he had had to disappear to Costa Rica, but his successors maintained his policy of absolute prohibition of every form of worship. In Chiapas some of the churches were open but all were without priests. There has lately been news of a peasants' rising in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, where some peasants were murdered by troops while trying to say their prayers in the ruins of one of the churches Garrido had demolished. General Cardenas has promised redress.

Illegal atrocities may be matched by illegal acts of clemency. In many parts of the country, particularly in the tourist zone, greater indulgence was given than the law allowed. In Oaxaca I met a priest who wore clerical clothes in the streets without molestation. One Sunday, while I was in Mexico City, the Catholic students of the University marched in procession to Guadalupe ; the matter was kept out of the newspapers and no action was taken against them. In general, however, the regime in Mexico is still violently anti-religious.

The number of priests permitted in any State is decided by the Governor. This is everywhere grossly inadequate. In the United States and Europe the average is one priest to every seven or eight hundred Catholics ; a priest with 1500 in his charge, particularly if they are scattered in a rural district, would rightly regard himself as overworked. In Mexico the average is said to be one to 10,000 ; this is a somewhat unsatisfactory figure since some States have no priests at all ; in some one is allowed to every 30,000, while Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca, Cuernavaca and Taxco are fairly well provided. Many of the priests whom the tourist sees in these places, however, are there in defiance of the law with the temporary connivance of the authorities ; they are legally criminals and are liable to arrest at any moment should the temper of the police turn. In the conditions the priesthood have been given exceptional facilities by the hierarchy and say numerous Masses on days of obligation. Seminaries are absolutely forbidden everywhere ; this law knows no extenuation and the police are active in searching for and confiscating any house where theological instruction is given. A large seminary has been established in Texas and this has supplied many priests in recent years, but, as well as this, seminaries do exist secretly in most of the dioceses. The lot of the students is miserable, for to the normal austerities and restrictions of their life is added the necessity of keeping completely out of sight during the entire period—two or three years—of their studies. Financial support, moreover, is so meagre and precarious that they live in conditions of genuine privation. In spite of all this there is no shortage of applicants. Persecution is already having its normal result of producing a priesthood of intense devotion. Only a very small number, however, can be maintained in this way ; the law against the immigration of foreign religious is still rigidly enforced and the shortage of priests is acute. Added to this is the fact that in the case of trouble of any kind they have no civil rights.

The religious orders are still forbidden absolutely as they have been since the time of Juarez. One of the show places of Mexico is the hidden convent of Puebla ; the place where Mr. Graham Greene's acquaintance was disappointed of babies' bones. It is, nevertheless, a thrilling place, and it is singularly obtuse on the part of the government to make the show of it that they do. Here, in the heart of the town, a community of enclosed nuns lived for over seventy years without the knowledge of the police. It was a seventeenth century foundation of no particular importance in colonial times ; when Juarez drove out the nuns elsewhere this little community escaped notice ; they were a poor order, with few possessions to attract the government agents ; they had always led a life of strict retirement ; now they disappeared from the knowledge of all but a handful of friends ; their little patio was so built that no building overlooked it ; they had their chapel and a gallery with eyeholes through which they could see the altar of the neighbouring church and hear Mass on occasions when it was too dangerous for a priest to visit them. The only entrance to the world was through a small private house whose occupants were in the secret. Great ingenuity was used to disguise the two doors, through which provisions were brought to them and needlework taken as payment. Here they were professed, lived the strict rule of their order, and died ; their bones were thrown into a common pit which now provides a macabre exhibit for the curious. In the more generous times of Diaz novices were admitted but in the last years of its life this was impossible ; about forty elderly women were found there in 1935 when the police broke into the place.

One is shown it, as in a fashionable New York restaurant one is shown the devices of prohibition days which conceal the piping hot cellars where they ruin their wines. First the living room of the private house ; the guide pulls some shelves from the wall, presses a button and a door opens leading straight into the cell of the Mother Superior ; there is another concealed door in the house, at the bottom of the stairs, leading into the patio. The convent is still kept more or less as it was found ; it disappointingly revealed few treasures and no scandals. The most valuable find was a collection of very ugly paintings on velvet. There is still enough of the convent atmosphere left to give an element of outrage to each new intrusion. The guide himself, recruited with the rest from the local masonic lodge, had a shamefaced air. It was, to me at any rate, inexpressibly shocking to see him jingling the little penitential chains which they had found the nuns wearing ; to hear him sneer at the underground cells where the nuns retired for meditation and at the three foot door through which they crept to Mass. It affected others, too, in the same way ; one could hear them arriving jauntily and noisily, with slightly lubricious expectations ; they thoroughly enjoyed the secret doors ; it was all part of a detective story ; then, as they tramped round those secret places, they became ill-at-ease and silent. They knew they had no business there. A few of them asked questions, ' Why were the nuns turned out ? '

' It is against the law.'

' What harm were they doing ? '

' They were breaking the law.'

Some, who had never before had any acquaintance with convent life, were obviously startled. Their shock found expression in such phrases as, ' Morbid kind of place '. But I do not think they really meant this. What they were feeling was a sense of personal guilt. They were prying into things with which their own lives had no contact. They came out into the street in subdued little parties.

I do not know what impression the Government seeks to give in the Hidden Convent ; the guile of the religious, the zeal of the detectives, the uselessness of a devotional life ? I suppose all these things. I am sure nothing could serve their purposes worse. There are plenty of empty monasteries and convents in the country, now mere architectural monuments with no keener spiritual associations than the ruins of Fountains or Glastonbury ; but everything is so recent at Puebla. It is not merely that the sightseer can picture for himself the scene of a few years back when the police suddenly burst into the silence and bundled the old women into the streets which they had not seen for half a lifetime; it is that he feels that in his own trespass the outrage is being daily re-enacted.

There is a repugnance for many people about the idea of monastic life. No one suggests that it is a suitable life for any except a particular and relatively rare religious type; for certain people however it offers the highest happiness and development. To deny these people the right to live in the manner they require is a denial of religious liberty.

The churches, as has already been mentioned, are the property of the state; in some districts they have been demolished; in others locked; in the most favoured localities a proportion of them have been returned on sufferance to the people for the use of their priests; the furniture and decorations, such as have survived, are the property of the state; even in the Cathedral of Mexico City the vestments have been removed to a neighbouring museum. Innocent tourists believe it to be a kind of sacristy. While I was seeing them a lady asked, 'Do the priests often wear those things?'

'No, madam,' the guide replied with a certain grim humour, 'not often.'

'I should think not. They are far too valuable.'

'Yes, far too valuable.'

Pictures and statues are still constantly being removed from churches, ostensibly to be put in museums.

Religious processions or the wearing of clerical dress outside the church walls has long been forbidden. Some thirty years ago the Scottish colony of the city held a banquet on St. Andrew's Night. They had a piper ; many of them wore the kilt ; at the end of the evening they decided to walk home in a body. The police did not like the music or the bare knees. They were run in for causing a disturbance, and innocently pleaded that it was St. Andrew's Night. The fine was promptly doubled ; they had taken part in a religious procession.

Outside the church walls no association of a religious character is allowed ; this is interpreted in the most oppressive way to proscribe any sort of social gathering of Catholics ; not only are the bazaars and sewing parties and recreation clubs that make a part of normal parochial life, illegal ; a man's house may be confiscated if he holds family prayers with his own household.

The government is still active in trying to efface its Christian past in changing the names of streets, cities and natural features, that have christian associations ; pages could be filled with examples of the minor discomforts and humiliations to which practising Catholics are put in every branch of the regime. The most vital question, next to the existence of the priesthood, is education.

As has been mentioned above, the department of education is in openly communist hands and the teaching it prescribes not only omits religious instruction but makes anti-religious instruction a prominent part. No kind of alternative school is allowed and parents are obliged to send their children to be taught doctrines which they abominate. The only place where religious instruction is allowed is in the churches and it is necessary for the catechists to coax the children there during their playtime. It is one of the duties of the government schoolmaster to watch these classes and whenever he knows that a class is to be held, to arrange other activities ; he also holds up to the ridicule of the school those children who attend. They are nevertheless well attended, and it seems to many observers likely that if their success increases new repressive measures will be taken, for the degree of toleration now granted is on the supposition that religious practice was a foible of the elderly that would die out with them. ‘ I am tired of closing churches and finding them full,’ said General Cardenas in a public speech at Oaxaca. ‘ Now I am going to open the churches and educate the people and in ten years I shall find them empty.’

Will he ?

So far I have only given an account of the situation from the outside ; the spectacle of an armed minority blockading the Church and starving it to death ; the resistance of the people has shown itself only in spasmodic, spontaneous outbursts of indignation, and in a wistful tenacity which, unsupported, must in its nature fail. But out of sight the work of the Church is going on. There are no eucharistic congresses or mass meetings of Catholics in Mexico ; but there is, nevertheless, a religious revival in progress that is transforming the Mexican Church ; driven into the catacombs, the Church is recovering their spirit. I was allowed to see something of this work while I was in Mexico ; the workers must remain anonymous ; they meet in empty houses in shabby streets. They go in constant danger and I must write nothing that can give a clue to their identity. I may, however, say something of the nature of their work. In personnel they are mainly laymen and women of modest means and good education and they are organized under the Bishops to carry out purely spiritual work. There are no *pistoleros* among them ; no talk of political disturbance ; they seek to train and maintain teachers, within and outside the government service, to counteract the official atheism ; they facilitate the movement and concealment of the priesthood in the proscribed areas ; they issue simple doctrinal and devotional pamphlets ; they organize study groups where men and girls of undergraduate age can discuss religious questions and examine the official doctrines with which they are stuffed in their classes. They have taken as the basis of their discussions the encyclicals of the late Pope, those relating to the particular problems of Mexico and the ' *Quadragesimo Anno* ', which owing to local difficulties was never, I believe, fully promulgated in Mexico.[1] It was this pronouncement which defined the Catholic meaning of ' social justice ', and offered an alternative solution to the Marxian class-war for the problems of our industrialized world. There is nothing reactionary, in the common use of the word, about the aspirations of this lay organization in Mexico, nothing that will fit into the idiotic dichotomy of Left and Right. Nor is there anything specifically national. They believe that the remedies they advocate are universal, but that their need is manifestly acute in their own country. For in Mexico nationality, colour and race are so confused, the divisions of class so artificially emphasized and embittered and the whole principle of government so disordered that only some extra-national force can bring relief. Such unity as the country ever enjoyed was the gift of the Church ; it was the Church who saved the Indians from slavery and established their fundamental equality and identity with their conquerors. It is popular to believe that after the first generation the Church neglected her mission ; so far as that was ever true, she has paid for it and is starting her work again on her old, true principles. The problem of rebuilding the Mexican nation is the difficulty of finding any common principle on which to work. Identity of economic interests is a weak enough bond even in a more or less homogeneous country ; in Mexico the divisions of the urban, unionized labourer and the peasant are unbridgeable in economic terms. Every class and individual is obsessed by grievances, real or imagined. Only the broadest possible identity provides a common interest ; the identity, in fact, which the theologians defined at the time of the conquest ; the identity of a common human nature and individual souls. Even in the times when the divisions of caste were most meticulously observed, the Church was a reminder of this equality ; tiny, significant incidents recur in her history ; to build the shrine of the Pocito ladies of fashion worked with the common labourers ; in 1849 Pavil Robertson,[1] a rigid protestant, was particularly struck by the freedom with which classes and races mixed in the Easter festivities ; the priesthood was recruited from

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[1] Neither conservative nor socialist party was particularly anxious for the people to know how much Catholic doctrine has been borrowed by the Socialists. Mr. Graham Greene in *Lawless Roads* mentions a Bishop of San Luis Potosi who kept the encyclical *De Rerum Novarum* stacked in his cellar.

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[1] *A Visit to Mexico.* 1853.

Spanish and Indian alike ; the *hacendado* would confess and take the last sacraments from the son of one of his peons ; it was from this fundamental identity that a healthy state might have evolved. That it did not do so is indisputable ; so is the fact that those who, in a hundred years, have brought the country to her present pitiable state, were, without exception, enemies of her religion. The lay organizations believe that it is only through the Church that Mexico can recover health and unity. But they do not think this can be done merely by re-establishing the hierarchy and restoring the churches. They do not want a Catholic government of the kind of the Emperor Maximilian, who posed as a Christian prince, while personally breaking the church's laws and doubting her teaching. They have not, in fact, any particular views on the kind of government they want, believing that a good people will evolve its own political organization. They are at an earlier stage than that of preparing political programmes ; they seek to restore the people to a state of faith without which no political programme has any value.

It is a huge and simple ambition in comparison with the slick new world proclaimed by their enemies, but they are setting about it methodically and devotedly. One could spend all one's time in Mexico among Mexicans and know nothing about it. But it is there and the men and women I met who were engaged upon it were the only genuinely happy and hopeful people I met in Mexico.

CHAPTER EIGHT

INDEPENDENCE

I

SEPTEMBER 16th is Independence Day in Mexico. On that day 1810, Hidalgo, an elderly priest who had for some time attracted the suspicions of the authorities by his neglect of his clerical duties and by his political interests, forestalled arrest by proclaiming to his parishioners at Dolores a ‘ new dispensation ’ and summoning the Indians to recover from ‘ the hated Spaniards ’ their stolen lands. His proclamation is called the *Grito*, or shout, of Dolores. There is evidence that Hidalgo had few religious convictions, but he used his position as priest to give the revolt the air of a crusade. The Madonna of Guadalupe was used as his standard. He became temporarily master of his district, opened the gaols, and soon found himself at the head of a disorderly army of 80,000, armed with agricultural implements, who overran the countryside looting and murdering. At Guanajuato, in two massacres, they killed about 500. The Indians had brought their women with them to carry the loot, but as they deserted others took their places. They overcame one body of troops and advanced on Guadalajara with 100,000 men and 95 pieces of artillery. At the Bridge of Calderon they met 6000 trained soldiers and were routed. Hidalgo was caught while attempting to escape towards the United States and executed, leaving behind him a written statement of his repentance. His rebellion lasted less than a year. It is not an incident which many nations would look back to with particular pride ; it has nevertheless captivated the Mexican imagination ; its anniversary is a public holiday and, on its eve, it has become the practice for the President of the Republic to appear on a balcony of the Palace and repeat Hidalgo's *Grito*.

We were fortunate enough to obtain tickets of admission to the ceremony. Most of the diplomatic corps were there, the leading officials civil and military, and a large assembly representative of all degrees of Mexicans. Our sponsor, a member of the former governing class, suffered a little from social embarrassment which was shared by the acquaintances he met. " Why, what are *you* doing here ? " " My English friends wished to see it. But what are *you* doing ? " Each made some excuse or other.

The whole range of state apartments that give on the Cathedral square were open and crowded. People were shoving one another round the windows trying to get a place as near as possible to the Presidential balcony. The square was full of people, but from the palace one could see very little, for we were blinded by the floodlights that played full on us. Fireworks went off spasmodically in the darkness, rockets, squibs and now and then a set-piece ; a large portrait in coloured fire revolved and was consumed. Mickey Mouse flamed up. There was more or less continual cheering, which grew louder when the President appeared—and drowned his utterance of the *Grito*. Then he came back into the room and it was over. I reflected on the divorce that flood-lighting makes between public men and their audience ; we think of them gazing down on a mass of eager faces ; all they see is a blaze of electric light and a microphone ; they might be speaking to the sea from the promenade deck of a liner.

For the first time I saw the President at close quarters ; he is certainly a supremely national figure, squat and sturdy and clumsy, with a high narrow head and that peculiar mirthlessness that characterizes the Mexican Indian. People were crowding round him now shaking hands ; he was embracing the men with the awkward, national hug ; they were all about his height and weight and build ; he seemed to be embracing a succession of relatives at a rather gloomy family gathering.

There had been a presentation of some sort ; a relic of one of the revolutionary heroes, the handkerchief, I think, which bound the eyes of Morelos when he was executed. It was in a frame and the photographers were trying to get a picture of him and it together. It is not easy to make a satisfactory picture of a little man with a heavy frame, particularly when he is surrounded with people trying to embrace him ; at last they got him isolated for a moment, held the relic like a halo behind his head and flashed their lights at him as he stood, stolid and sombre, but not at all ridiculous because he was not attempting to strike any attitude. He just stood ; and then went on with the rough, loveless embraces.

It is obviously impertinent to try to judge a man's character from a glimpse of this kind, but I had been talking about him, off and on, to all kinds of people, for weeks, and the impressions I had formed became concrete that evening. There was nothing of the charlatan or the doctrinaire about General Cardenas. Calles is said to have remarked, as he went into exile, ' I never counted on his vanity ', but he does not seem to be a vain man in any ordinary sense of the word. People speak of him, and he speaks of himself, as a socialist, but I do not think he is interested in ideas. He is an excellent tactician ; he knows his terrain and he never leaves it ; he knows how to become powerful in Mexico. He came into authority in a country that had been reduced to anarchy and acute distress by a generation of revolutions. He knew that the avowed aims of the revolutionaries—the policy of the Party—had never been put into practice. He had been brought up with this policy on every lip as the only one which anyone cared to admit to. Accordingly he set out to consummate it. He has encountered difficulties he never foresaw. It sounded so simple ; the capitalists and foreigners are rich ; the peons are poor ; take the possessions of the capitalists and foreigners and distribute them ; then everyone will be happy ; if the results are disappointing it is because not enough has been distributed ; take some more ; then more still until no one is hungry. It is a policy naturally intelligible to a general accustomed to the exigencies of commissariat ; let the army live on the country. Much cleverer and more knowledgeable people than himself, men like Lombardo Toledano, have told him that this is the way to repair the ravages of his predecessors.

A question that is often asked with particular reference to oil confiscations but with general application, is how can the President save his face if he finds a reversal of policy necessary? The answer, I think, is that face-saving is not a problem of Mexican politics; the question, there, is to keep in power. Mexicans do not expect much of their leaders; they have been disappointed and betrayed too many times. The leader is not answerable to an informed, critical and effective public opinion; his position depends on maintaining support from a balance of forces—mainly the army and the trades unions. There are no hallowed constitutional uses that he need fear to outrage; there is effective rule and anarchy, and the dual altruistic aim of government in seeing that the people do not starve and that the nation remains independent. The change from the system in force in Mexico to that of Germany is a matter of symbols and of discipline. The people have adopted the clenched fist and the hammer and sickle as Hidalgo's mob adopted the Guadalupe; they have fallen into the habit of regarding the failure of a big industry as a victory in the class war. If these victories, fought under communist symbols, are found to be barren of benefits they can effortlessly proclaim a new allegiance; a few executions perhaps would be needed; then the people would go back to work as Nazi socialists and the nation would adopt new protectors. Democracy, for them, has meant wealthy foreigners getting richer with their help. Atrocity stories do not shock them; they are the commonplaces of their own political history. There is a heresy in the Nazi party that is condemned—but rather leniently punished—under the title of National Bolshevism; a combination of the race-myth with the destruction of private property that seems peculiarly apt for importation into Mexico. And the trade routes for its importation are already established.

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Independence is perhaps the one national achievement that has not lost its glamour for the Mexicans. It has been accompanied by countless disadvantages, many of which have been noted in earlier chapters of this book—the loss of more than half the national territory, the disappearance of learning, the ascendancy of unworthy rulers, a decay in prosperity which has borne most hardly upon the poorest, the waste of whole provinces. Perhaps it is unjust to attribute these entirely to independence. Mexico has certainly proved quite unamenable to representative government ; on the other hand Spain itself, in a less degree, was suffering from similar disasters and experiments ; nineteenth and early twentieth century Spain was in no condition to govern a distant empire ; the disability was increased by the loss of the empire ; it has been a vicious circle in which both peoples have suffered.

It was a natural reflection, on Independence Day, to wonder what precisely Mexico was celebrating. There has not been a period in her century of Independence when her rulers have not been subject to effective foreign pressure ; at times, as under Maximilian, she has been occupied by foreign troops. At decisive moments in her history, as when Miramon was forced to raise the siege of Vera Cruz, the United States have intervened in favour of a government they hoped would be sympathetic. In the days of Diaz the country enjoyed the kind of international status which comes from the domination of big business. The last ten years, perhaps, have been the time of greatest freedom and they have been years of almost unrelieved failure. But the Mexicans do mean something by Independence which, I think, works out to mean recognizable identity. A foreigner, wherever he comes from, knows the moment he crosses the frontier that he is a foreigner. The place has its own aspect ; the people their own habits ; it is easy to say that these things might survive political absorption ; the observable fact is that they do not ; they vanish inexplicably and have to be kept alive by folk societies and tourist agencies. Mexicans cherish their usages and even those who find the regime antagonistic are reluctant to emigrate. They see what, through annexation, has become of California and obstinately prefer their own comparative disorder and desolation. On the other hand it seems to be the trend of industrial history that small units cannot survive. Fifty years ago it was reasonable to think that a system of universal free exchange in currencies and commodities would result in a civilization in which political divisions would be mainly sentimental ; here a king, there a republic ; nationalities would become matters of dialect and costume ; a universal banking system would provide a *lingua franca*. Marx accepted this contemporary assumption in one set of terms ; the idea of the League of Nations is another. At the same time it was pointed out that man's loyalties did not embrace large systems ; Scotsmen were patriotic about Scotland, not about the British Empire. There was a Scottish national movement and a Welsh national movement, to match the Irish; attempts were even made to revive Cornish as a nationality. The less important political frontiers became, the greater was the attraction of a disintegrating loyalty of each district to the traditions in which it had its origin. Separatism of small nationalities depended on the separation being sentimental. A reasonable man of the last generation might well have welcomed and expected the indefinite multiplication of sovereign states in a single, universal financial structure and a machinery for international litigation and conciliation.

In the last ten years, however, the process has changed. Political frontiers have become more important than at any time in history, rival financial structures have developed and ruthless mergers have consequently extinguished the small political units. Central Europe had broken up; it is now riveted together; Spain began to break, Catalans and Basques have been forced into national unity. More remarkable still, as a symptom of this process a new sentimentality has arisen which infects the younger generations of every race and is unintelligible to most men over thirty—crowd-patriotism. Hitherto the instinctive reaction of a self-respecting man to a crowd has been one of revulsion. In a mob people will applaud oratory and themselves shout words which individually each one of them would regard as ridiculous; worse than that they will commit atrocities from which they will recoil in horror next morning. Of all forms of intoxication that which comes from participation in mob enthusiasm is the one which should bring the bitterest aftermath of shame. It was one of the great arguments in favour of wider dissemination of general knowledge—that the nineteenth century liberals called education—that it would produce a race of individual thinkers who would be proof against demagogy and hysteria. By all reasonable expectation the discovery of wireless telegraphy should have contributed to this new individualism ; a man could listen to his political leaders at his own fireside, uninfected by the emotions of his neighbours ; he had ample time to examine the arguments before acting on them. Ten years ago, or less, this would have seemed a sound assumption. Events, however, have proved the reverse. As traditional sources of intoxication have fallen into increasing disrepute, mass hysteria has grown. People find a masochistic relish in being jostled and stifled in a crowd and in surrendering their individual judgments. Instead of diversity of opinion, they prefer rival orthodoxies. 'How does so-and-so stand, Left or Right ? ' 'Well, it's hard to say exactly.' 'Ah, sitting on the fence. No contemporary significance.' They love a crisis because a sense of universal danger, real or imagined, draws them closer to the mob. In a world where such influences are dominant, what chance does a country like Mexico have of retaining its independence ?

It is not a purely American problem. The outcome of the Spanish war is vital to it. It may effect it directly in more than one way. First, there is the possibility of a large influx of population from the defeated side, who at the time of writing are corralled in France and towards whom cordial if somewhat noncommittal sentiments have been expressed. From the beginning of the Spanish war the Mexican governing party expressed the belief that the Spanish republicans were fighting the battle which they themselves had already won. Their contributions to the Republican side were not extensive ; they sent some obsolete armaments which were sunk in transit and they received a number of unhappy Basque children—whom one General advised shooting—who are now interned in the State of Morelos in circumstances which are said to be rather similar to those of the legionaries now in France. There were some Mexicans on both sides in the Spanish war, more I believe, on Franco's than the republic's. The responsibility of finding a refuge for the republican army is one which all parties are trying to impose upon one another. When those who fought for local—Catalan or Basque—patriotism, those who were prepared to compromise on their economic doctrines and those who merely found themselves geographically in republican territory and were recruited for that side, have been eliminated, there will remain great numbers of stateless men—Italian and central European communists, intransigent Spanish communists and anarchists and the thousands of criminals who, at the outbreak of the revolution, were liberated from prison and armed—for whom a home must be found. It appears that something like 50,000 men will come into this category. An attempt will certainly be made by the other nations to settle them in Mexico and it is difficult to see on what grounds the present government can refuse to take them. Their arrival could only mean a vast increase of the anarchical element which might drive the army into revolt. A successful military usurpation would almost certainly be followed by the adherence of Mexico to the German trade group that is being busily built up in Latin America. This is far from being an imaginary danger ; it has been little exposed in England except in the socialist press, but it is a development which is causing genuine alarm in Washington. It is to counter this danger, not to preserve European frontiers, that the U.S. armaments programme is directed. There are already large colonies of Germans in various parts of South America, in particular on the Brazil-Argentine border ; German and Italian business firms—which under the Nazi system mean the State—control important industries all over the continent ; the air lines are predominantly German, with control of the landing grounds ; the steel industry in Chile and the port of Malbrego in Peru are largely German. Italians are training the Bolivian army and the Lima police force ; in the South of Peru, in the Chichama valley, Japanese troops protect extensive Japanese sugar properties. British and American interests are still predominant but every German settled constitutes a Nazi unit under the direction of party headquarters ; there is a wireless service and a chain of newspapers controlled by Germany and devoted to Nazi propaganda ; in certain Brazilian districts the government is virtually in the hands of the German Nazi leader. The competition everywhere is of a totally different order from that of rival British and American firms. At present German penetration in Mexico is mainly confined to the Guatemala border where German planters have imported large quantities of arms and maintain a private defence force. A movement to confiscate these properties might be an international event of the gravest consequences. Nazi negotiations to secure the expropriated oil fields are open and, at the time of writing, still liable to success. It is far from fantastic to believe that in the event of political conditions in Mexico being propitious, Germany is prepared to intervene with vast, ready-made plans for taking control. It must be observed in this connection that the United States Government will no longer be embarrassed by their radical supporters from taking action.

3

There is another way in which the outcome of the Spanish war may affect Mexico ; the re-emergence of Spain as a power with imperial memories. People are now prophesying the disappearance of Spain from international politics ; she has, it is thought, internal problems of reorganization which will keep her employed for a generation, problems for whose solution she will need the help, and consequently the influence, of the individualistic states. She is seen now with her country laid waste and her people divided ; her weakness is assured.

But Germany has shown, as revolutionary France showed before, that reconstruction can be accompanied by expansion ; that there is no better way of solving the problem of a divided people than in uniting them in a series of dangerous national experiments. In 1920 it would have seemed ridiculous to foretell that in fifteen years Italy was going to defy England and France on an African-Mediterranean issue and do so successfully. War does not always generate war-weariness ; it generates, also, a taste for fighting ; victory generates victory ; there is a centrifugal force which renders further expansion necessary to protect the gains already won. This is not necessarily so, but it is often so in history.

Franco's soldiers have fought under the inspiration of their past ; they saw their country disintegrating, as their colonies had done, into a group of republics run by men whose policies were derived from abroad and were antagonistic to national tradition. They fought to prevent Spain becoming like Central America. But to re-establish Spain and make it a single people is, to many Spaniards, only the beginning not the end of a national renaissance.

In 1934 Ramiro de Maeztu published a work called *Defensa de la Hispanidad*—' the Defence of Spanishness ', the Essence of Spain ; it was written in the darkest days of the Republic and it expressed defiance of the alien ideas that were permeating the government. It embodies the aspirations of the Phalangist Party. A third edition was issued last year in Valladolid. It has added to it, in this edition, a map of the empire of Philip II. The significance of this, and its obvious affinity with the marble maps of the Roman Empire which Mussolini has erected in Rome, need no comment. If those maps in Rome have proved an inspiration to the Italian people, relating as they do to a period two thousand years earlier, to the achievements of a people who bore different names, professed a different religion, spoke a rather different tongue and were genealogically of rather uncertain connection with the present occupants of the city, how much more must the dominions of Philip mean to the Spaniard, conquered by the men whose direct descendants are fighting by their side and bearing the titles they won in battles less than four centuries ago ; men who are as real and present to them as Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney and Elizabeth are to the modern Englishman, who spoke the same language and worshipped the same God in precisely the same forms as they do today.

Hispanidad has been caught up outside Spain in South and Central America, where for a hundred years ' Spanishness ' has been subjected to insult and persecution. It is being taken up as the antithesis not only of communist rule but in the words of Cardinal Goma against ' Monroeism, Statism, Protestantism, Socialism and simple mercantilism '. *Hispanidad* is in the heart of every South American who has been treated as a dago. Italians grew impatient of being treated as picturesque and indolent guitar players, and are now reviled as swash-bucklers. Spanish-Americans have the still less amiable reputation of gigolos. Perhaps they will surprise the world. They are the heirs of those little companies who sank their transports and set out in steel cuirasses through tropical jungle, into lands not even known in legend, to conquer an empire. Much can be said against the Conquistadores for their cruelty and avarice, nothing against their courage and resource. *Hispanidad* represents the view that the Spaniards having driven the Moors out of Europe and having discovered and captured the new world, were betrayed by politicians and driven into temporary obscurity from which it is their birthright and destiny to arise. It will be seen that it has close affinities with the German race-myth. At present, since its opponents have been, in the main, atheists it has been strongly Christian in sentiment, but Christianity and the race-myth cannot long work together.

Until a year or two ago the feeling of *Hispanidad* was dormant in most Spanish-Mexicans because economic security pre-disposed them to acquiesce in their humbled position. Race-myth can only flourish under a sense of persecution ; now that they have been dispossessed the emotion has a new face.

This sentiment is there, and growing. I heard it, in one form or another, from many Spanish-Mexicans. When, however, one comes to translate it into real politics the difficulties are enormous. There are only a few thousand native whites in Mexico ; perhaps they will shortly be swamped by an immigration of communists from Spain ; in any case what can the whites do ? Their movement, if it took the form of a caste restoration, could not hope for success. But supposing, which is not inconceivable in the light of the past decade, that Spain emerges once more as a world power and supposing she declares the whites in South America as her special concern, and supposing, as is already to some extent the case, that the Germans seek to overturn the Monroe scheme of American balance . . . It is all in the air, and conjectural, but these possibilities should be borne in mind as possibilities.

Another doubt occurs ; a mere pencilled query in the margin of current history. Was the *Plumed Serpent* as fantastic as it appeared when we first read it? The Nazis have been able to stimulate a cult of pre-Christian deities; suppose there were a similar revival, of the kind Lawrence predicted, among the mestizos and the Indians. They are a devotional and superstitious people. When people of their kind are deprived for long of their priesthood and their sacraments, all manner of curious beliefs and practices spring up. Mr. Graham Greene reports a peculiar oracle in a tea caddy that is widely revered in the Godless State of Chiapas. The Mexicans cannot long get on without an object of worship. Suppose that *Hispanidad* beyond the Atlantic takes on a savage aspect, as European exports often do, there might be an anti-toxin of genuine paganism thrown out in the deceased body.

This again is purely conjectural. The fascination of Mexico lies in the stimulus it gives to the imagination. Anything may happen there; almost everything has happened there; it has seen every extreme of human nature, good, bad and ridiculous. It has, in a way, the position towards Europe that Africa had to the Romans; a source of novelty . . . 'always something new out of Africa' . . . but also a distorting mirror in which objects are reflected in perverse and threatening forms. The Romans sent their great men to Africa; they went to seed and became despots and voluptuaries; they sent their ideas and the Africans turned them into enigmas and paradoxes; the precise statements of Roman law and faith became equivocal in the African mirage; and when the barbarians came, Africa was the first to go; her canals silted up, her buildings fell, the sand swept in from the desert over her fields.

POSTSCRIPT

THE OBJECT AND THE LESSON

I

WE are justly suspicious of people who see the world in terms of the single problem in which they have a personal interest and specialized knowledge. We saw too many of them in the post-Versailles period, people who espoused the cause of neglected minorities or became obsessed by cartographical slips. Their foibles seemed innocent enough, but the result of them has been a series of incongruous alliances which has aggravated every political situation. Thus Catholic anti-semites in France have found themselves defying the Pope and pleading the cause of semitic Arabs against Christian rule, liberal Parliamentarians found themselves identifying the autocratic-imperialist rule of the Amharas with the cause of Democracy, champions of Basque nationalism were allied with international communism. Such are the confusions that arise through a piecemeal view of politics. At the beginning of this book I suggested that the present condition of Mexico had a world wide significance. In subsequent chapters I have tried to sketch the conditions. So what? Why should any ordinary American, still less a European, be interested?

First there is Mexico's geographical position, lying across the continent of North America separating the United States from the Panama Canal and sharing with her an immense, arbitrarily defined frontier which has been the scene, on both sides of it, of a long succession of bloody outrages. Internal disorder in Mexico has always constituted, and will always constitute, a lively physical danger to the United States citizens living near the border. Hundreds of men are still living who followed Villa in his raids into the United States.

Secondly there is her financial position. She bears debts of the New and Old world which she will never be able to pay. She is feverishly augmenting them by confiscations. She has great mineral wealth, notably in petroleum, for which the world has a use and which it *will* use one way or another.

Thirdly there is her political condition. For a generation there has been anarchy which has made it clear to herself and to outside observers that she has not the aptitude for the particular kind of individualist representative government which, it was assumed, would afford an eventual solution to her troubles. To President Wilson her only problem was to elect good men ; at his time there seemed only two kinds of government, one of which was discredited in 1918 ; there was democracy, as it was understood in France, England and the United States—government by rich men competing against one another for popular favour—and hereditary monarchy. Since then two forms of proletarian rule have appeared, Nazism and Communism. Mexico is at present enjoying an uneasy compromise between the two. Her adoption of either, or the outbreak of a civil war between them, would be an acute embarrassment to the United States.

Nor does the danger remain local. The Monroe doctrine is being challenged by Germany all over South America. Its peaceful acceptance in the first place by Europe was due to two main considerations. Communications across the Atlantic made a campaign there intolerably expensive and precarious, and, at the end of the last century, Europe was too busy parcelling up Africa to think about South and Central America. Since then an American army has fought in France. South America has become accessible as a battle-ground while at every point the German-Japanese alliance threatens vital American interests. An anti-Cardenas coup, which his policy increasingly provokes, might well result in Mexico joining the anti-Comintern Pact. She is exactly the kind of country where Nazi methods of government and industrial organization might be expected to bring substantial results. Germany and Japan know this ; so do the United States ; so do a few Mexicans.

It is in small countries, not in large ones, that world wars start ; particularly in heterogeneous states like Mexico.

But, the reader may object, when there are so many causes for alarm, everywhere, what is the good of multiplying them with purely hypothetical dangers ? Because the ordinary news services of paper and wireless bulletins have not the time to keep the public informed of anything beyond day to day news. When a crisis is announced we hastily turn to our atlases and look out the new danger spot. We feel that these sudden explosions of international enmity, first in one part of the world, then another, are as wantonly strewn about the map as the bombs of the I.R.A. We have not the time to watch them as historical events in a series of cause and effect. If we have not heard of the problem before, we see it as unimportant; the result of some purely irresponsible and malicious agency. The truth is that, at this moment, when the papers are full of other things, Mexico is as dangerous to us as any part of the world.

2

And secondly, there is the simple cautionary tale of the origin and consequences of Mexico's decadence. Every state has something to learn from that. We were most of us brought up on the historical theory of recurrent waves of civilization which lasted a few centuries, built massive cities and tombs and were literally buried in the sands; an ebbing and flowing tide, city-desert, city-desert, to which, presumably, our own culture would one day be subject, but at a date so distant that it need no more be considered in practical calculation than the Last Judgment. We were educated in the assumption that things would not only remain satisfactory without our effort but would with the very minimum of exertion on our part become unrecognizably better. The elimination of physical pain and privation was assumed not only by buoyant characters like Mr. H. G. Wells but by Mr. Aldous Huxley, who limited his apprehensions to pointing out that a life without pain and privation might be compensatingly dreary. Even at the time of writing when tempers are gloomier, the air is one of nervous vexation that progress should be checked by malicious intervention ; progress is still regarded as normal, decay as abnormal. The history of Mexico runs clean against these assumptions. We see in it the story of a people whom no great external disaster has overwhelmed. Things have gone wrong with them, as they went right with us, as though by a natural process. There is no distress of theirs to which we might not be equally subject.

Some try to comfort themselves by supposing that the difference of races put Mexico at an initial disadvantage, but, in fact, it is difficult to find any stage at which this was decisive. The white Spaniards interbred freely with the Indians and the prestige and advantages attaching to white blood were little, if at all, more than those attaching to noble and gentle blood in contemporary Europe. As purely heraldic standards of eminence began to decline in Europe, so did those of racial purity in Spanish America. For the last hundred years Mexican leaders of all opinions have been white, Indian and mixed without distinction. Americans and British who see the colour question as vital to Mexico are arguing in terms of their own country and colonies.

Nor has there been any lack of what are generally spoken of as ' enlightened ideas '. Almost every unhappy figure, from Iturbide to Cardenas, who has appeared as a leader of the country, has spoken in the phrases of contemporary advanced thought. The country has known, in form at least, Napoleonic-masonic monarchy, liberal-representative democracy, German-enlightened-constitutional monarchy, international-individualist-capitalism, socialism, dictatorship of the proletariat, and, it seems probable, will shortly develop a species of Hitlerism. There is no question of Mexico decaying, as have other civilizations, by reason of a rigid system that has proved itself inadequate to changing needs. Every marked step in her decline, in fact, has corresponded with an experiment towards ‘ the Left ’.

The reasons for her decline have been primarily moral ; the majority of her rulers have not been men of goodwill and their aims have been purely material ; if one starts by assuming that the only real good of which man is capable is the enjoyment of consumable goods—and that has been the assumption of the ‘ Left ’ for a hundred years—it is a very easy step—logically an inevitable step—to accumulate the goods exclusively for oneself. Altruism does not flourish long without religion. The rulers of Mexico have almost all started by denying the primary hypothesis of just government.

Secondly, in the political sphere, there has been no true conservatism in Mexico. There have been rival politicians appealing to the interests of rival groups.

A conservative is not merely an obstructionist who wishes to resist the introduction of novelties ; nor is he, as was assumed by most nineteenth century parliamentarians, a brake to frivolous experiment. He has positive work to do, whose value is particularly emphasized by the plight of Mexico. Civilization has no force of its own beyond what is given it from within. It is under constant assault and it takes most of the energies of civilized man to keep going at all. There are criminal ideas and a criminal class in every nation and the first action of every revolution, figuratively and literally, is to open the prisons. Barbarism is never finally defeated ; given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly, will commit every conceivable atrocity. The danger does not come merely from habitual hooligans ; we are all potential recruits for anarchy. Unremitting effort is needed to keep men living together at peace ; there is only a margin of energy left over for experiment however beneficent. Once the prisons of the mind have been opened, the orgy is on. There is no more agreeable position than that of dissident from a stable society. Theirs are all the solid advantages of other people's creation and preservation, and all the fun of detecting hypocrisies and inconsistencies. There are times when dissidents are not only enviable but valuable. The work of preserving society is sometimes onerous, sometimes almost effortless. The more elaborate the society, the more vulnerable it is to attack, and the more complete its collapse in case of defeat. At a time like the present it is notably precarious. If it falls we shall see not merely the dissolution of a few joint-stock corporations, but of the spiritual and material achievements of our history. There is nothing, except ourselves, to stop our own countries becoming like Mexico. That is the moral, for us, of her decay.

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At the age of thirty-five one needs to go to the moon, or some such place, to recapture the excitement with which one first landed at Calais. For many people Mexico has, in the past, had this lunar character. Lunar it still remains, but in no poetic sense.

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